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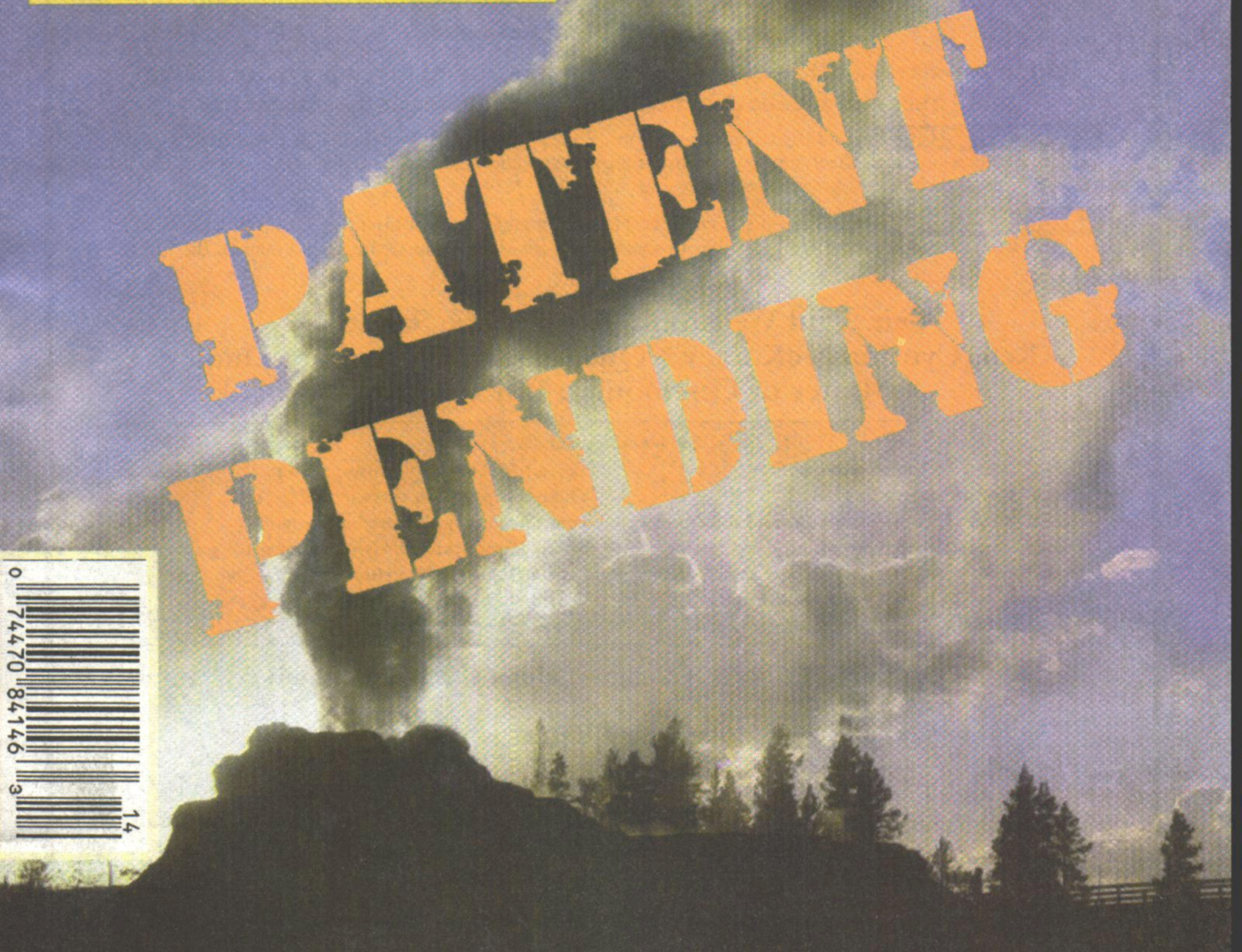
In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

May 31, 1998

THE SECRETIVE SALE OF YELLOWSTONE'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Craig Aaron and Christopher Smith report



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Francis Calpotura on community organizing
Joel Rogers on citizen action and social policy
Lisa McGowan on international finance
Katherine Sciacchitano on welfare reform
Robert McChesney on the media
Chris Lehmann on class in America
Dan Cantor on electoral strategies
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editorial

Bill, Meet Karl

Like beauty, progress is in the eye of the beholder. To Bill Clinton and his friends in both major parties, progress means modernization, and modernization—now that international capital is no longer constrained by Cold War rivalry—means unfettered mobility for corporate investment. At home, that translates into deregulation. Abroad, our leaders call it free trade.

One hundred and fifty years ago, when Karl Marx described capitalism and predicted its future, he also saw mobility of capital as the engine of unprecedented progress. In *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848, Marx praised capitalism for creating, in its then short history, "more massive and more colossal productive forces than all preceding generations together." The discovery of the Americas, Marx wrote, "paved the way" for the establishment of the world market, which, in turn, gave "an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication." But capital expanded wherever it could, and as it did so, it put an end to all the feudal ties that "bound men to their natural superiors," leaving "no other bond between man and man than naked self interest [and] callous 'cash payment.' "

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, our corporate rulers have taken advantage of the worldwide disorientation of the left to turn back the clock throughout the world. Just look at Japan.

That was how Marx viewed the capitalism of the mid-19th Century. Since then, much of what Marx called the "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation" of capitalism has been softened under pressure from working men and women who fought for and won the right to vote, formed labor or socialist parties and passed laws to limit corporate rapacity. The result, for most of the industrialized world, was a social democracy that restrained and regulated corporations and provided an array of social benefits.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, our corporate rulers have taken advantage of the worldwide disorientation of the left to turn back the clock in the United States and throughout the world. Under the banner of modernization and progress, hard-won rights are under attack. The right to a job, environmental protections, social security, public education, health care, mass transportation and the arts are all being thrown back on the market's mercy—or lack thereof.

Consider Japan. As it modernized in relative isolation from the rest of the capitalist world, Japan retained some of the more socially responsible traditions of its feudal past. Jobs in Japan were usually guaranteed for life. Protection of domestic industry was the rule. Banks and industry were heavily regulated. And even now, after more than seven years of economic stagnation, things don't look so bad to most Japanese. Unemployment is at a record high of 3.6 percent, but that rate is almost 2 percent lower than the unusually low current U.S. rate. Inflation in Japan is zero. Interest rates are not much higher than that, and the bankruptcy rate in slumping Japan is still one-third lower than in the booming United States.

Yet the Clinton administration talks as if Japan were on the brink of disaster and warns that Japan's obvious reluctance to "reform" its economy threatens the entire world's stability. And most infuriating to these leaders of the free trade world, Japanese people seem content in the midst of this catastrophe.

The problem, or, as the *New York Times* puts it, "Japan's problem," may be that "life is too comfortable" and the Japanese people lack a "crisis mentality." As a result, "Japan cannot summon the political will to lay off surplus workers" or to "snuff out the hopes of the kindly old ladies who run rice shops and futon stores." As one young banker told the *Times*, the economic restructuring that America is demanding would undermine Japanese "fairness, equality and civility." To foreigners, the *Times* explains, Japan often seems "virtually socialist in mindset." Believing profoundly in social equality, it has the most steeply progressive income tax rates in the world—with a top rate of 65 percent— which enables it to achieve a relatively comfortable society for all people.

Belief in this virtual socialism has been widespread. But after the Soviet Union collapsed, as the young banker told the *Times*, he "thought that socialism had failed and that capitalism was better." Then he went to Singapore, saw skyscrapers surrounded by slums and changed his mind. He, like most Japanese, understands that things will have to change under the relentless pressure from the corporate world. If Japan is to continue enjoying its export market, it will gradually have to toe the line and forget about equality and security.

But is this progress? —**J.W.** ■

In These Times
INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS
"... with liberty and justice for all"

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Volume 22, Number 13

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Letters

Classroom Cheerleader

I was stunned by Silja J. A. Talvi's unabashed cheerleading in support of the San Francisco quota system for class reading ("Required Reading," May 3). The inflammatory move was to propose a quota system for literature on the untested theory that a school system whose African-Americans have a D average shouldn't teach them differently, just assign more books by people of color. And so what if Latinos demand Latino writers? Should they be given comic books or MTV if they demand that? Education isn't about pandering to the consumerist whims of students. Those black writers who'll be assigned—Morrison, Baldwin, Ellison—grew up reading Shakespeare, Keats and Dickens. Maybe that accounts for the quality of their prose, perish the thought!

Despite Talvi's propaganda, this issue has more to do with trendy educators and political correctness than any realistic hopes of boosting reading skills. It's insulting to the students themselves to claim—absent any real change in pedagogy—that a quota system for literature can raise SATs. And it's insulting to *In These Times* readers that Talvi reports only one side of such a nationally debated issue, while relegating those of us who call ourselves progressives but don't favor quotas for literature to outer darkness. As a novelist and playwright, I believe that good writing can touch everyone with an IQ above room temperature, no matter what skin color. Plenty of other lefties—black, Latino, Asian and white—agree, but you'd never know it from what Talvi wrote.

Lawrence Richette
Philadelphia

MOXed In

Joel Bleifuss' recommendation that extremely valuable plutonium be vitralized and buried in salt domes is a good one ("A MOX on Both Our Houses," April 19). In fact, that was the plan originally proposed to dispose of expended fuel rod assemblies from civilian atomic power plants. But it has been stalled for almost 50 years by the oil industry as a means of killing nuclear power plants.

The irony is that after years of delay, warhead plutonium suddenly appears, and it becomes very easy to find a storage site for spent fuel rods. Do I smell a rat?

A. Dutky
Omaha, Neb.

Corrections

Due to a copy editing mistake, not an error on the part of the author, In These Times *incorrectly reported in "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (May 17) that* Washington Post *writer Walter Pincus had not covered Central Intelligence Agency Inspector General Frederick Hitz's admission that the CIA once had an agreement with the Justice Department that allowed the agency to ignore drug trafficking by CIA assets, agents and contractors. In fact, Pincus was one of the few mainstream journalists to report Hitz's testimony.*

In "Too Hot to Handle," in the same issue, the name of the Pearson corporation was misspelled.

In These Times *regrets both errors.*

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Labor Aims for the New York Ballot

BY DOUG IRELAND

Progressive union leaders in New York—representing a combined membership of nearly half a million workers statewide—are trying to launch an independent, labor-based ballot line for the November elections. The as-yet-unnamed, union-led effort will endorse a candidate for governor in June, and if the candidate garners at least 50,000 votes this fall, the new line will achieve permanent ballot status—the first step toward creation of a full-fledged labor party for the Empire State.

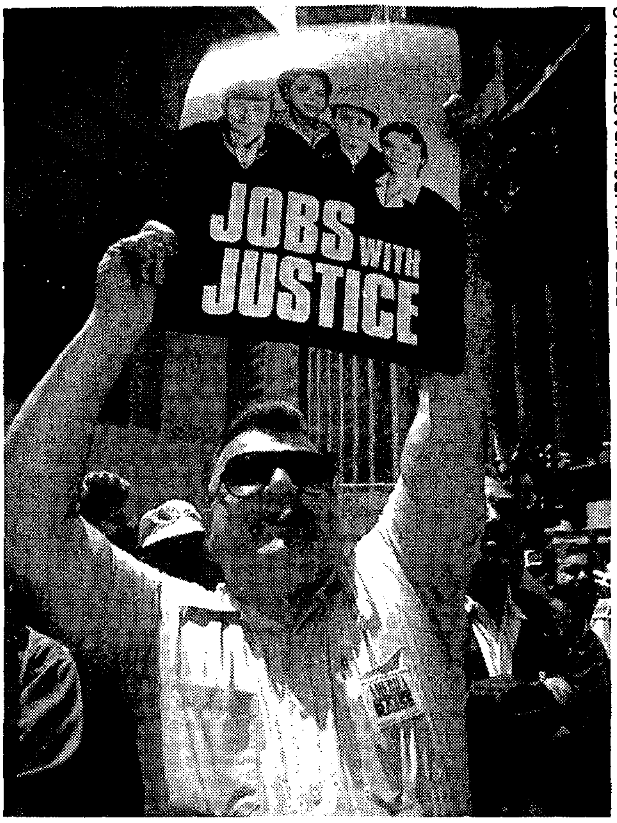
New York is one of only 10 states that allows candidates to appear on more than one ballot line. These cross-endorsements have allowed alternative parties to play a key role in the state's history. The Liberal Party, founded in the '40s to support Franklin Roosevelt's re-election, played a pivotal role in re-electing mayors Robert Wagner and John Lindsay, as well as Sen. Jacob Javits. But since its heyday, the Liberals' union base in the needle trades has withered away, and the party has become a Potemkin Village of patronage-seekers. The party is now run by Ray Harding, a lawyer-lobbyist who sells endorsements to the highest bidder. Still, the Liberals' endorsement last year of Rudy Giuliani for mayor gave him a fusion fig-leaf that was crucial to his election.

The state's Conservative Party has played a similarly decisive role in disciplining the GOP, by running or threatening to run its own candidates. In New York, blackmail politics works.

So, why shouldn't it work for labor? As Bob Master of the Communication Workers of America—the point-man for the new labor ballot line—puts it: "The political perspective of labor and working people has no voice in state politics, especially since the Democratic Party has moved to the right. Our people look at Harding and the Liberals, see a guy with no organization and no troops yet with tremendous political clout, and ask, why aren't *we* doing this? Why don't *we* have this kind of clout for *our* politics? Why not create a political vehicle that puts our kind of populist economic politics forcefully into the political debate?"

So, Master and the politically potent New York region of the Communication Workers are spearheading the petition drive for the new ballot line. Also involved in planning the effort are the New York regions of the United Food and Commercial Workers, the United Auto Workers and the International Association of Machinists; the Civil Service Employees Association, the Buffalo Teachers Federation and the Syracuse Central Labor Council; as well as various locals of Teamsters, Service Employees, Transit Workers and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. In addition, the effort is being supported by Citizen Action, ACORN and the fledgling New York chapters of the New Party.

State election law requires the collection of just 15,000 signatures to get a new line on the ballot. But with the help of Union Summer volunteers, the labor group plans to collect at least 100,000 signatures—which should be enough to withstand any legal challenges from the established parties—in a six-week petition drive that kicks off in July.



FRED PHILLIPS/IMPACT VISUALS

New York unions are planning to make their voices heard at the polls in November.

While there is some sentiment for endorsing one of the five Democratic candidates in the race for governor, none are considered populists, and all are weak and largely unknown. It's more likely that the new ballot-line group will field its own candidate. In any case, Republican Gov. George Pataki is virtually assured re-election (in recent polls he's capturing 40 percent of the Democratic vote). This means the labor-led coalition can run an independent candidate without being accused of bringing down the Democrats. Among the possible candidates are former Brooklyn City Councilman Sal Albanese, who ran a populist campaign for mayor last year, and former Mayor David Dinkins. Some insist the candidate should come from labor's own ranks.

Regardless of who gets the nod, the greater focus is on getting the 50,000 votes needed to win a permanent spot on the ballot. If they succeed, it will shake up New York politics in a way that's long overdue. ■

labor

Feds Clear Hoffa for Teamster Rerun

BY JANE SLAUGHTER

On April 27, concluding a five-month investigation into misconduct during James P. Hoffa's 1996 campaign for the Teamster presidency, federal election officer Michael Cherkasky cleared Hoffa to participate in a rerun election this summer. Despite chronicling numerous illegalities—including several carried out by Hoffa himself—Cherkasky decided none was serious enough to merit disqualification.

After an earlier investigation, Teamster President Ron Carey was disqualified from the rerun last November for allegedly participating in a scheme to divert $735,000 in union funds to his 1996 campaign.

In addition to a slew of violations by Hoffa's running mates, Cherkasky found that Hoffa lied under oath to federal investigators, covered up a $1,000 campaign contribution from discredited former Teamster President William McCarthy, and hired a man convicted of grand larceny as a campaign staffer (and then tried to hide it by paying his salary to the felon's wife). Hoffa's campaign was fined $31,000.

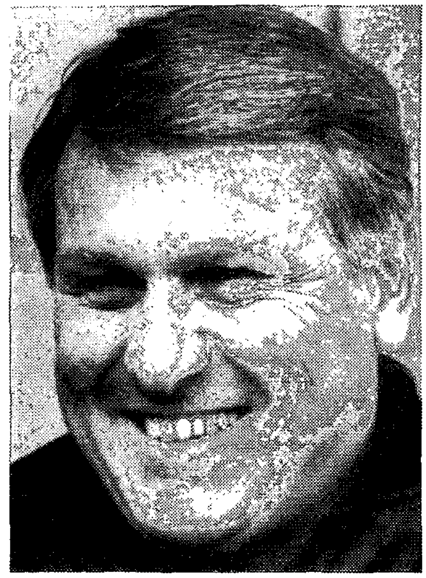
Hoffa's opponent in the new election, Ken Hall, a Carey ally who is backed by the reform wing of the union, called on Hoffa to quit the race. "Teamster members deserve better than a candidate who has blatantly violated election rules," says Hall, who faces an uphill battle because of Hoffa's name recognition and head start in campaigning.

The investigation into Hoffa began when the Carey campaign questioned the source of $2 million Hoffa raised in contributions under $100, which candidates were not required to report individually. Carey supporters charged that some of the money came not from individual donors but from employers and local union treasuries run by Hoffa supporters. But, citing the Hoffa campaign's aggressive sales of union caps and T-shirts, Cherkasky ruled it credible that "a substantial majority" of the $2 million in non-itemized donations could have come from lawful sources.

In the most significant part of Cherkasky's ruling, Richard Leebove, the chief architect and spokesman for Hoffa's 1996 campaign, was banned from working on this summer's rerun. Leebove contributed $167,650 in in-kind services to the first campaign, which was illegal because Leebove is technically an employer—he runs a PR firm—and employers of any kind are prohibited from contributing to Teamster elections. Cherkasky also suspects that Leebove extorted $23,500 from American Income Life Insurance Company, which sells insurance to union members, to subsidize his unpaid work for the Hoffa campaign.

The loss of Leebove is a major setback to the Hoffa campaign. Renowned for his poison pen and campaign dirty tricks, Leebove is viewed by many insiders as the brains behind Hoffa's operation. Leebove says the election officer was out to get him because he exposed Cherkasky's own legal problems in a campaign for district attorney of Westchester, N.Y.

Cherkasky did not blame Hoffa for another subsidy he alleges that Leebove received from a local union treasury. During the campaign, Leebove was hired to produce the newsletter of Teamster Local 337, which paid him $73,500 in 1996. At the same time, Leebove worked close to full-time for Hoffa nearly free of charge. The principal officer of Local 337, Larry Brennan Jr., is Hoffa's boss and mentor. Hoffa, an attorney on Brennan's staff, was certainly aware that local union money was being used to subsidize his campaign. Cherkasky argued, however, that such an arrangement did not show fiduciary mismanagement on Hoffa's part, placing all the culpability with Leebove.


JIM WEST

A happy James P. Hoffa

In his report, Cherkasky contrasted Carey's "abuse of official authority" and "intentional misconduct" with Hoffa's supposedly lesser behavior. Cherkasky concluded that there was no effort by Hoffa to willfully flout the rules. Throughout the document, he leaves open the possibility that illegal donations were made—but he uncovered no smoking gun.

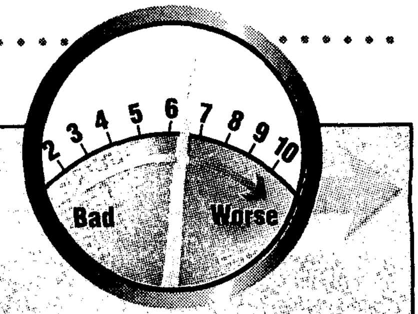
While Cherkasky was perhaps less than vigorous in pursuing Hoffa, there's merit in his decision. He called the disqualification of a candidate "an extraordinary anti-democratic remedy to be used as a last resort." Last fall, the government denied members the right to decide for themselves whether to vote for Carey despite his alleged misdeeds, but they will get their say on Hoffa.

"The investigation showed the kind of crooks that surround Hoffa," says Ken Paff, national organizer of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). "The members do not want to go back to that. There's a lot of cynicism, but there's also a realization that this election is about the future of the union." ■

Jane Slaughter *is a labor journalist in Detroit.*

appall-o-meter

BY DAVID FUTRELLE



The In These Times Index of Indecencies

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Virtual Reality 8.9

It was inevitable: In a recent incident on the roads near Marseilles, France, a young woman was distracted from her driving by the squawks of her Tamagotchi "virtual pet." While attempting to tend to the pet's needs, she careened into a group of bicyclists, killing one and injuring another.

After School .38 Special 7.5

Put those awful memories of the Jonesboro and Edinboro killings out of your mind for a moment. Children are the future—at least as far as American gun manufacturers are concerned. Facing a slumping market for guns in the United States, the *Washington Post* reports, gun manufacturers and gun enthusiasts alike are trying to drum up interest in firearms among kids as young as 10, using cartoon characters and gun camps to catch their attention. "The future of the shooting sports and our Second Amendment will rest on the shoulders of our grandchildren," National Rifle Association (NRA) president Marion Hammer declares in an ad for the organization. "That's why, as NRA president, my major [priority is] to reach out to America's youth."

Take Two Bullets and Call Me in the Morning 9

Elsewhere on the gun front: After reading reports that prescription drugs may kill as many as 10,000 people a year due to improper usage or excessive side effects, John Michael Snyder, public affairs director of the Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms, demanded that liberal "gun grabbers" stop talking about gun-related deaths and start calling for a ban on prescription drugs. "When a high-profile tragedy occurs in which firearms play a part," Snyder said, "Clinton and other anti-gun politicians, officials of anti-gun groups and media anti-gun groupies jerk their knees sky-high in reactive demands for more and more restrictive firearms legislation. Why aren't they jerking their knees up high today with demands for more restrictions on prescription medicine?"

Shocked, Shocked! 4.8

This month's award for the "Biggest Insult to Our Intelligence Posing as a Complaint About Insults to Our Intelligence" goes to Kelly Johnston of the National Food Processors Association. Quoted in the National Environmental Trust newsletter, Johnston says: "It is insulting to the integrity of American business and to the intelligence of the American public to imply that any industry contributes to Congress to buy votes." Of course, everyone knows members of Congress aren't bought and sold—merely leased. ■

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left politics

Still Divided

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

Concluding one of the most bitter internal disputes in the organization's history, Sierra Club members voted last month not to adopt a policy advocating "an end to U.S. population growth through reduction in net immigration." Instead, members approved a measure put forward by the group's leadership that calls for the club "to address the root causes of migration by encouraging sustainability, economic security, human rights and environmentally responsible consumption." The vote was 60 percent to 40 percent against the anti-immigration initiative, with a record 84,000 of the club's 550,000 members mailing in their ballots.

Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization, the ad-hoc group that sponsored the initiative, promise to return next year. One of the group's leaders, Rick Oberlink—former leader in the campaign to pass anti-immigrant Proposition 187 in California—blames the defeat on the fact that members were not allowed to vote yes or no on the measure, but were instead provided with a choice of two alternatives. "It appeared that it was a choice between addressing population growth domestically or globally." Oberlink says. "We think the outcome would have been very different if Sierra Club members were presented with a comprehensive population policy that included addressing population growth at the global level and at the national level, including reducing immigration."

Brad Erickson, a club member who worked against the measure as coordinator of the San Francisco-based Political Ecology Group, was thrilled with the outcome. "The vote shows that scapegoating is out of step with the environmental movement," Erickson says. "The members of the Sierra Club have affirmed that blaming immigrants is misguided and mean-spirited." ■

labor

Coal Mining's Dirty Secrets

BY PAT ARNOW

According to a ground-breaking investigation, if federal regulations passed almost 30 years ago had been strictly enforced, black lung disease would be all but eliminated from the nation's coal mines. But because of widespread fraud by the coal industry, thousands of working miners and retirees still suffer from black lung. In 1994, the last year statistics are available, nearly 1,500 miners died from the disease.

The investigation by *Louisville Courier-Journal* reporters Gardiner Harris and Ralph Dunlop, published in late April, documents years of cheating on air-quality reports. Harris and Dunlop interviewed 234 current and former miners who said they knew of routinely falsified tests. Just 21 miners said they had no knowledge of cheating.

Test results often reflected dust levels as low as fresh outdoor air, clear evidence of fraud since no mine could have air that clean. "Common practices [the miners] described include running sampling pumps less than the required time or placing them in clean air away from working areas," the reporters wrote. "Scores of miners said they had never seen a dust test done correctly." Miners often go along with fraud because they fear the mines will close down.

In one astonishing revelation, the *Courier-Journal* found that 39 percent of samples from mines once owned by Kentucky Gov. Paul Patton showed impossibly low levels of dust. The paper found no evidence that Patton personally knew about fraudulent samples in his mines.

But during his term, Patton has pushed much tougher workers' compensation regulations, which have all but eliminated benefits for miners disabled by black lung. "In my opinion, by and large, the law has been obeyed," Patton told the *Courier-Journal*, describing the 1969 federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. "By and large, people are not accumulating disabling black lung in any significant numbers."

But for Sen. Paul Wellstone (D-Minn.), who visited Kentucky miners last year on his "Poverty Tour," the *Courier-Journal* series confirms that serious problems remain in the industry. In a written statement, Wellstone called for funding for more mine inspectors. "The federal government should take over coal-dust sampling," Wellstone said. "That responsibility shouldn't be in the hands of the companies." ■

Pat Arnow *is a writer in Durham, N.C.*

Wharfies Rebound

AFP PHOTO

Dockworkers at Port Botany wharf in Sydney, Australia (right), celebrated a court decision ordering their employer, Patrick Stevedores, to rehire 1,400 fired union workers.

Two weeks earlier—in what conservative Australian Prime Minister John Howard called "a defining moment in Australian industrial-relations history"—Patrick, the country's second largest cargo-handling company, replaced its entire work force with non-union workers in a government-backed effort to break the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

The workers victory was short-lived. The company immediately appealed the decision to Australia's highest court, and the reinstatement of the workers, known as wharfies, was put on hold pending a ruling expected in early May. As *In These Times* went to press, the union's chances looked good. One High Court justice said, "It's an important point of principle, established by Parliament that you don't sack people for union membership." ■

Press Pass

Buy the Jeep, Mommy

BY DAVE MULCAHEY

When civilization winds down to its last hours, no doubt the business press will hype its demise as a business opportunity. I picked up the April issue of **American Demographics**, intrigued by the rather sinister illustration on its cover. Next to the headline "Tapping the Three Kids' Markets" is a rendering of the evil twin of one of the sad, saucer-eyed tykes in those Keane paintings from the '60s. Kitted out in modish sneakers, sweater and baseball cap, a Super Soaker assault weapon slung over his shoulder, this larrikin looks decidedly unwaifish. Judging from his steely gaze—slightly off-center, with the trigger eye squinted—he's getting ready to frag an illiberal parent as soon as he finishes his carton of fruit juice.

Meet the new filiarch. For those of you not up on the latest marketing neologisms, filiarchy is when Mom and Dad let Junior choose the family's brand of cereal, computer or sport utility vehicle. According to James U. McNeal, professor of marketing at Texas A&M, once marketers insert their names and logos into a brat's "evoked set" of brand preferences, they've got his folks hooked. "Kidfluence," McNeal argues, has become marketing's holy grail in all sorts of unexpected product categories, playing a key role in $17 billion worth of auto sales alone last year.

Moreover, kids are eagerly doing their own bit to help the nation avert a depression. McNeal reports that aggregate spending by children aged 4 to 12 doubled each decade in the '60s, '70s and '80s, and so far in the '90s it is tripling, approaching $25 billion annually. (The most important factor fueling this prodigality? Wages—kids' wages, that is.) Lest this trend be mistaken for the dawn of pedo-Keynesianism, McNeal hints that it may belie darker truths about American culture. "Parents no longer worried that their kids would have it as good as them—they knew they wouldn't," he writes. "So they gave them more money, more things, and more power over household spending." *Fin-de-siècle* pessimism ain't what it used to be.

• • • • • • • • •

Neither is the pastoral business. In a thoughtful reflection in the spring **World Policy Journal**, political scientist Michael Budde decries the Holy See's dabbling in the dark arts of marketing. "Ours are strange times indeed," Budde writes. "The pope makes multimillion-dollar publishing deals, enjoys cross-media promotions that exemplify the corporate dreams of 'synergy,' signs off on joint ventures with information behemoths like IBM and Digital, and—just like Mickey Mouse, Batman and the Rolling Stones—has his image licensed to makers of hats, mugs and T-shirts."

At times Budde's jeremiad comes off as a little overblown. It's not clear, for example, how digitizing the Vatican archives is less dignified than herding tourists by the millions through the Sistine Chapel. But he makes a persuasive case that the West's "postmodern social and cultural environment" has nullified Christianity's traditional "tools of lay formation" and forced churches into a potentially fatal embrace of the culture industries. The only way out of this dilemma, Budde argues, is to renew "the countercultural nature of Christianity." Whatever that is.

• • • • • • • • •

The sad decline of the **Chicago Sun-Times**, the Second City's also-ran daily, became a little more apparent recently in a pathetic bout of internal censorship. In April, the paper ran a profile of late actor and civil rights crusader Paul Robeson on the occasion of his hundredth birthday. The article focused on Robeson as a "Renaissance man" and downplayed his more controversial career in left politics, reports Michael Miner in the **Chicago Reader**. Even so, when the story appeared, *Sun-Times* Editor-in-Chief Nigel Wade went into a fit of rage.

Wade's editorial underlings got the message. Features Editor John Barron had slated a piece on radical academic and onetime outlaw Angela Davis, who was due to speak a few days later before a large audience at the University of Chicago. This time Barron thought he'd better run the story by the boss first. It was killed. Staff reporter Lori Rotenberk, author of the Davis profile, was left in tears the next week as the **Chicago Tribune**, that hoary voice of the Silent Majority, ran a Davis profile of its own. The *Trib,* Rotenberk lamented to Miner, even "presented [Davis] as a '90s woman and said 'communist' in the lead." ■

Dave Mulcahey, *a senior editor of* The Baffler, *lives in Chicago.*

VIEW POINT

The Palestinian Problem at Half Century

BY ELIE CHALALA

Throughout the Middle East and the diaspora, Arabs are commemorating what they refer to as *al-nakba*, the "uprooting" and "catastrophe" that befell the Palestinians when Israel was created in 1948. The Arab-Israeli peace accords notwithstanding, they are still in mourning.

Among all mourners, tradition binds one to withhold words that may offend. At this moment in their history, however, such reticence is a luxury Arabs may not be able to afford, for there is more than one catastrophe for Arabs to mark in their solemn remembrance of 1948. Fifty years ago, Arab culture was thrown into a state of paranoia, opening the doors of Arab politics to ruthless forms of dictatorship and laying Arab economies to waste. At the risk of violating established custom, the mourners throughout the Arab world must pause to ponder these other, perhaps more debilitating, tragedies.

Arab nations and politics were embryonic when catastrophe befell the Palestinians in 1948. Still-fragile political institutions fell prey to the logic of war and military leadership. Preparations for war supplanted all other political purposes. Throughout the '50s and '60s, military factions took turns overthrowing civilian governments, then moved against each other in a cycle of coup and countercoup. By the time this struggle stabilized in the early '70s, flagrant violations of basic individual rights had become a fact of life. Decades of oppression, coupled with a greater command of the art of control, normalized fear and produced mass obedience to the state.

Born out of 1948, Arab military regimes used their common enemy to legitimate themselves and their military aggression. Syria, for example, invaded Lebanon in 1976 to defend that country against Israel. Saddam Hussein went to Kuwait in 1990, supposedly to unify the Arab world. In addition to the great cost of human life, these wars have squandered the region's resources, unleashing one economic catastrophe after another. In his authoritative book *The Explosion of the Near East*, George Corm paints a dark picture of Arab economies in the '90s, showing the cumulative effect of years of economic neglect. Corm, a French author of Lebanese ancestry, points out that in the '60s the combined economies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon were roughly equivalent to South Korea's. Today, South Korea's GNP outstrips the GNP of the Arab countries by a factor of five—even though South Korea has half the population. Even if one expands the comparison to include the "oil rich" Arab states, the picture remains bleak. Including oil output, the entire Arab region registered a GNP of $510 billion in 1994, roughly the equivalent to the economy of Spain.

The Arab world needs to recognize that it is perpetuating a cycle of tragedy and loss.

Yet few Arabs have dared to speak out for fear of having their patriotism questioned. The psychological disorder afflicting Arab cultural life since 1948 has not been healed by any peace agreement, and Arab intellectuals continue to bombard each other with charges of "sleeping with the enemy." For example, a pro-Palestinian group in Lebanon recently planned a conference to commemorate *al-nakba*, which was to include a panel of Jewish intellectuals born in the Arab world. Among them were a Moroccan author, an Egyptian psychologist and a Lebanese journalist—all known for their uncompromising support of the Palestinians. But extreme nationalist Lebanese and Palestinian groups quashed the event anyway.

Even one of the Arab world's most distinguished intellectuals has come under attack. Ali Ahmad Said, who writes under the pen name Adonis, is perhaps the most creative living Arab writer, often discussed as a potential candidate for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Yet Arab intellectual zealots have ostracized him ever since he attended a 1995 conference in Spain that included Israeli intellectuals. The zealots accuse of Said of advocating *al-tatbi*, the normalization of economic and cultural relations with Israel. As this intellectual "state of war" drags on throughout the Arab world, illiteracy in the region has risen from 58 million in 1982 to 61 million in 1990. That number is expected to hit 66 million by 2000.

On the 50th anniversary of the 1948 "catastrophe," the Arab world needs to recognize that it is perpetuating a cycle of tragedy and loss, generations of catastrophes spring from the original. It is these generations of catastrophe that Arabs must find a way to change.

Speaking with the London magazine *Al Wasat* ten years after receiving the Nobel Prize in 1988, Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfouz suggested that political freedom is needed nowhere more urgently than among the Arabs. "The whole world is headed toward democracy," he said. "If the Arabs fail to develop intellectually, politically, economically and [to learn] how to use media, they are on their way to perish." ■

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FORGOTTEN AMERICA

Welfare Reform at Work

BY JUAN GONZALEZ

A supervisor at Harlem Hospital in New York City pulled Helen Slade aside a few months ago. "Miss Slade," the supervisor said, "will you take this new person under your wing? Show her what to do."

The new person, Slade realized right away, was a WEP — a welfare recipient assigned to the city's "Work Experience Program." Hospital administrators called them "volunteers." They began quietly placing two or three WEPs on each hospital floor.

"Me being a Christian lady, I'm gonna tell the WEP the right thing," Slade says. "You're dealing with patients with two legs and a heart, not something out of Toys 'R Us." So everywhere Slade went, the WEP worker went.

New York undercuts union wages with welfare workers.

Slade knows her job. She has spent 19 years bathing and cleaning patients as a nurse's aide at Harlem. She has made their beds, changed their diapers, and lifted and turned their wasted bodies to fend off sores. She has clasped their hands at night when despair washed over them.

A few weeks ago, Slade got her reward for all those years of service. The city fired her and 271 other Harlem employees as part of 900 layoffs at the Health and Hospitals Corp. Harlem was hit with the most layoffs in the city, and the nurse's aides got the worst of it; 98 got pink slips, 80 percent of the nurse's aide staff.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Luis Marcos, chief of New York City's public hospitals, say that Harlem has become more a jobs program than a hospital. They say all the city hospitals are overstaffed and underused because of managed care. But Harlem, they insist, is the worst, having lost 30 percent of its patient load.

But even if you assume Giuliani's numbers are right, why did his hospital chief fire 80 percent of the nurse's aides and half the housekeeping staff at Harlem? The answer is that Harlem, like other public agencies around the country, is using welfare recipients to work.

According to hospital union leaders, the same day Slade and the 97 other nurse's aides got their walking papers, two dozen new WEP workers reported to Harlem Hospital to replace them.

The city hospital union held a protest outside Harlem the day the layoffs were announced. Standing next to Slade at the rally was another fired nurse's aide, Donna Alonzia. Ten years ago, Alonzia was a troubled teenager; she had several children and was living on welfare. Then a community program got her a part-time job at Harlem Hospital. After that, she completed her high school equivalency and straightened out her life, and hospital officials offered her a full-time nurse's aide job. She's been at Harlem ever since. Now the city that wants to cut its welfare rolls has replaced Alonzio with a WEP worker.

"I'm not going back to welfare, they treat you horrible there," she says. "I just want to work."

Giuliani insists that none of the more than 35,000 welfare recipients the city has put to work in its agencies has replaced a city worker. That would be illegal under state law. But union leaders charged that Giuliani was breaking the law and that welfare recipients were doing hospital workers' jobs. The union went to court and on April 23, the day of the hearing, the city suddenly backtracked. Officials announced that 1,000 WEP workers were being pulled out of the hospitals.

What has been lacking in this stampede from welfare to work is a clear understanding of why this "welfare reform" is happening now. For more than 20 years after the Vietnam War, the nation suffered from high unemployment. U.S. companies kept shifting production abroad, downsizing their domestic work force, and reducing real wages and benefits. During that period, politicians and the multinational corporations that bankroll them willingly tolerated a "permanent underclass" maintained by taxpayer-financed welfare. That, after all, was better that than having periodic riots in the cities.

But by the mid '90s, the Soviet bloc had collapsed and the global rise of neoliberal economic policy opened huge new markets to American capitalism. In the past few years, with U.S. unemployment rates at their lowest in decades, corporate America has faced the prospect of a domestic labor shortage and the wage inflation that would accompany it.

Thus, the sudden appearance of "welfare reform." By throwing large numbers of people into the labor force, private industry and local governments manage to exert a downward drag on the wages of the lower strata of the working class.

But American labor movement has failed to make the unionization of these "workfare" recipients a priority, making matters worse. Until recently, unionization of government workers was one of the labor movement's few bright spots. Welfare reform has ended that.

As the WEPs at Harlem Hospital have known for a while, that "reform" is a disguised attack on every American worker. ■

TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER

Corporations jump from town to town in search of the best public subsidy

By Neil deMause

For as long as anyone in the town of Waterloo, Iowa, could remember, there had always been a Waterloo Industries. Even as the local economy faltered and the John Deere plant made massive layoffs, the factory where workers made Sears Craftsman toolboxes remained, first sold to Beatrice—then to American Brands—but always a steady employer in this small city of 100,000 residents.

Then, in 1995, Waterloo Industries came to union leaders and announced that it had been offered $3 million by the town of Muskogee, Oklahoma, to relocate its plant there. The company gave the 300 workers a choice: Agree to 50 percent wage and benefit cuts or watch us leave town.

The union refused. And over the next two years, the Waterloo factory was dismantled and moved south.

The company's corporate headquarters remained in Waterloo, however, employing 120 workers in a building on the south side of town. But earlier this year, the company made another offer, this time to the city of Waterloo: Give us $2 million in land and tax breaks, and we'll build a brand-new headquarters downtown.

Over the shouts of dozens of former Waterloo Industries workers who packed the city council chambers to decry the subsidy, the council voted unanimously to take the deal. "This is one of the most important opportunities we've had in the downtown area for quite some time," said a local businessman after the decision. "It came at the expense of 300 jobs, but we can't do anything about that now."

For those Waterloo residents who are now out both a major employer and $2 million in tax money, the opportunity is hard to discern. "It's the worst example of corporate welfare," says Russ Woodrick of the Iowa Machinists Union, who notes that Muskogee is already giving Waterloo Industries $3,000 per job "created"—jobs that pay half the hourly wage of the Iowa plant. "We think it violates the intent of the law to move a business from one part of the city to another. But beyond that, there is the morality of it all—the people who are going to be taxed to make up for this money are the very people who are laid off and are going to have trouble paying their taxes."

The irony of a city rewarding a runaway, union-busting firm with tax breaks may be especially sweet, but the Waterloo Industries case is now business as usual across America. In the name of economic development, companies routinely receive "incentive" packages worth millions of dollars in exchange for agreeing to relocate their facilities or keep a current operation in town. The Waterloo deal was small-time by the standards of this interstate bidding war: A corporate heavyweight can swing a deal like the $253 million in tax breaks given to Mercedes-Benz by the state of Alabama in 1993, a "jobs package" that cost the state $170,000 for each job it created. Rio Rancho, N.M. (population 50,000), handed Intel more than $114 million in incentives and tax breaks in

1993. Intel was able to build a new computer chip plant, despite the fact that the town couldn't even afford to support its own high school.

The use of public money to fund private development is as old as the country itself. (Alexander Hamilton once received a tax abatement from the state of New Jersey for starting a business there.) But since the early '80s, public subsidies have become a strategy for stealing jobs from other states. Local governments, desperate to retain jobs by any means, increasingly bid against each other for everything from auto plants to shopping malls, without much regard for a return on their investment.

The menu of handouts includes not only tax breaks and direct grants, but such things as tax-exempt Industrial Revenue Bonds, which milk the federal treasury to provide artificially cheap money for private development projects. "Industrial Revenue Bonds go back to the '50s, when they were used by a lot of Southern states to steal industries," points out Greg Leroy, a researcher with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), whose 1994 report *No More Candy Store* remains the most comprehensive look at local corporate welfare. "There is a long piracy history of programs that subsidize capital and land."

Even more expensive and less publicized than tax-exempt bonds is a device known as Tax Increment Financing (TIF). In a TIF, a local government takes the increased property taxes that result from new business development, and kicks them back to the company to help pay construction costs—in effect, letting businesses pay their taxes and keep them, too.

First developed in California in the '50s, TIFs took hold with a vengeance in the '80s. Minnesota, for example, now hands out more than $1.5 billion per year in state economic subsidies, half of which are made up of TIFs. The most famous TIF recipients, the developers of the mammoth Mall of America, received $105 million in TIF money from the city of Bloomington.

Malls and other retail projects get a hefty helping of available development subsidies, despite an obvious drawback: Since new stores don't generate more shopping—only shift it from one location to another—any jobs that result are likely being siphoned from a neighboring community. A recent study of St. Louis TIF projects found that most were retail projects, even though the demand for retail space in the metropolitan area is so high that plenty of development would take place anyway. Missouri TIF manager Michael Downing told the *St. Louis Construction News and Review* that the TIF process is working backwards: Instead of cities selecting underdeveloped areas to target for TIFs, "A developer typically walks into City Hall and says, 'I have an interest in doing a project, but I can't do it without a subsidy.' "

With all this money flowing out to fund private development, something in local budgets has got to give—and with tax hikes a tough sell in most areas, that usually means service cuts. TIFs, which draw off the property taxes used for school funding, hit especially hard. One Minnesota study found as much as $100 million a year in education funds being diverted to corporate subsidies.

Though local business subsidies are notoriously difficult to track, state and local corporate welfare is conservatively estimated to cost at least $50 billion a year. That's more than the yearly national budget for welfare grants and food stamps—and doesn't even include federal corporate subsidy programs, which, depending on how you slice them, amount to another $75 billion to $167 billion a year.

This explosion in corporate welfare has not come without opposition, often from odd ideological bedfellows. Both Ralph Nader and the Heritage Foundation are vocal opponents of public subsidies to corporations, though they differ over just what constitutes a "subsidy." Progressives focus on the social costs of diverting public money to private uses, while libertarians oppose direct grants but have no problem with tax breaks. And businesses that miss out on subsidies have joined the chorus of complaint, arguing that companies that receive taxpayer money for their projects hold an unfair competitive advantage.

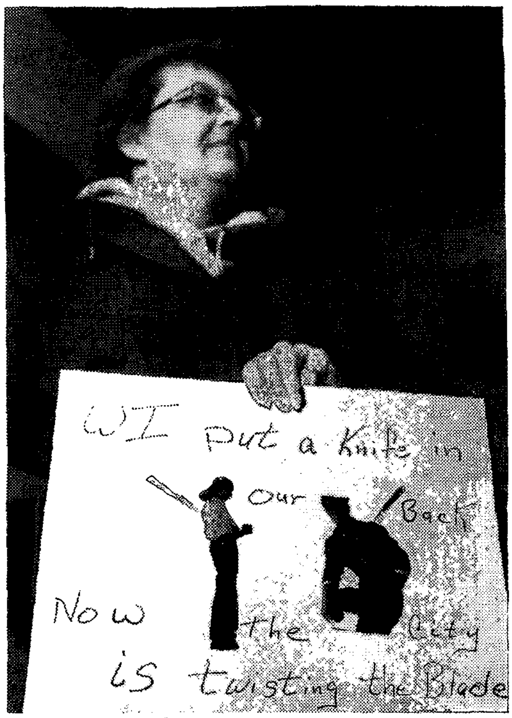
How to rein the practice in is another matter. Minnesota became the poster child for corporate welfare in 1992 when it handed $761 million in state grants and loans to Northwest Airlines for two new maintenance bases in a depressed region of the state—only to see the airline scrap the plants and keep most of the money. Outrage over the Northwest deal helped lead to passage of the state's Corporate Welfare Law in 1995, which requires that companies pay back all public funds if they fail to meet promised job-creation goals.

When the Minnesota Alliance for Progressive Action (MAPA) re-examined the results of the law last November, however, it made some startling discoveries. Reporting of subsidies had been haphazard at best, with many companies and even cities such as Minneapolis filing incomplete data or none at all. Several cities had handed out subsidies to companies that agreed to create as little as one minimum-wage job; others went them one better by subsidizing jobs retained, not created, an explicit violation of the 1995 law. And 13 companies that failed to meet even these limited job goals had nonetheless kept their state money. (One company, Morey Fish, accepted $934,000 and created zero jobs.) MAPA found it difficult to determine what, if anything, was being done to collect these funds.

When confronted by MAPA, officials in several cities claimed that these weren't really job creation programs, but rather were intended to provide needed services. As MAPA's Alexa Bradley recalls, some officials insisted that their constituents "really needed a Wal-Mart."

Efforts in other states had even more dismal results. A ceasefire agreement between the states of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut quickly collapsed, and the three states now spend about a billion dollars a year bidding against each other for business. Back in Minnesota, the ink was barely dry on a similar deal between the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul when St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman agreed to dole out $90 million to Minneapolis computer firm Lawson Software if it would relocate across the river. "They had an agreement not to compete. And the mayor of St. Paul says, 'I didn't go after him, he called me!' None of this stuff is enforceable," says Art Rolnick of the Minnesota Federal Reserve, who has

Waterloo Industries laid off 300 workers and moved its plant from Iowa to Oklahoma. In return, the city handed Waterloo $200 million.



to their local districts, and a tangible record of "creating jobs" makes a better electoral plank than one of having blocked interstate competition—even if the competition itself costs constituents jobs. "We're challenging a whole way of thinking about subsidies," says MAPA's Alexa Bradley. "Most city officials, and probably many state officials as well, think that we are on the begging end of this—that we should be doing whatever we can to get whatever job possible, and we aren't in a position to think of ourselves as negotiators, and as investors. If we're going to be giving this money away at all, we should be making sure that we're getting a good return for the community."

One alternative is used by the nonprofit group Rochester Area Economic Development Inc. (RAEDI), which brokers high-return economic development deals (mostly through

argued stridently for an end to what he calls the "economic war among the states."

For this reason Rolnick and others believe federal action is necessary. Last November, Rep. David Minge (D-Minn.) introduced the Distorting Subsidies Limitation Act, which would levy a federal excise tax on all direct and indirect subsidies for specific corporations, essentially taxing all individual corporate handouts as income. (General programs available to a wide range of businesses, such as small-business loans, would be unaffected.) Under the proposal, nonmonetary gifts like land or infrastructure would be taxed as "imputed income" at the value of the property.

A $120 million bill from the IRS might make the owner of a baseball club think twice about that $400 million stadium he's asking local taxpayers to finance. Indeed, the owners of the Minnesota Twins were among the first to condemn Minge's bill, calling it a threat to the national pastime. "It would have a very negative impact on the ability of professional sport franchises to survive under current financial circumstances," says Twins spokesman Dave St. Peter.

Several state legislatures have already passed resolutions calling for federal action. "They feel that they can't unilaterally disarm," says Minge. Indeed, many corporate welfare watchers feel the issue of subsidized job raiding should be a no-brainer for Congress. "Nobody in their right mind will defend Uncle Sam paying Peter to rob Paul," says Leroy of the SEIU.

Yet early reaction to Minge's bill has been lukewarm. Fellow Minnesota Democratic Rep. James Oberstar told reporters he would "do all I can against" the bill, saying it would prevent rural districts like his from using subsidies to lure businesses away from urban areas.

The federal government is supposed to be above that sort of "IMBYism"—as opposed to the better-known "Not In My Back Yard" syndrome. Yet members of Congress must answer

the use of TIF monies) for the city of Rochester, Minn. The group works to ensure that the public gets its money's worth, using such benchmarks as a $3,000-per-job cost, a $30 return in revenue for each public dollar spent, and a 5 percent limit on public investment in private projects. RAEDI also restricts its projects to businesses that are selling their goods and services outside of the area. "It's not a grocery store. It's not a retailer," says RAEDI's Gary Smith. "We're looking to bring new dollars into this economy, not recirculating dollars that are here."

Smith says he'd support a federal ban on all subsidies to private companies, though he doubts that will happen any time soon. "In a perfect world," he says, "if we got the public out of it altogether, it would probably be a better use of public funds." Yet with Congress stuck in IMBY-mode, and local elected officials afraid to be left out of the interstate job war, limiting subsidies to only the most productive may be the best short-term solution.

Leroy makes an even simpler distinction between good and bad subsidies. "Don't subsidize things that can run away," he says. "Don't subsidize private industry. Subsidize things that stay put, like infrastructure and education, things that have the highest possible long-term payoff."

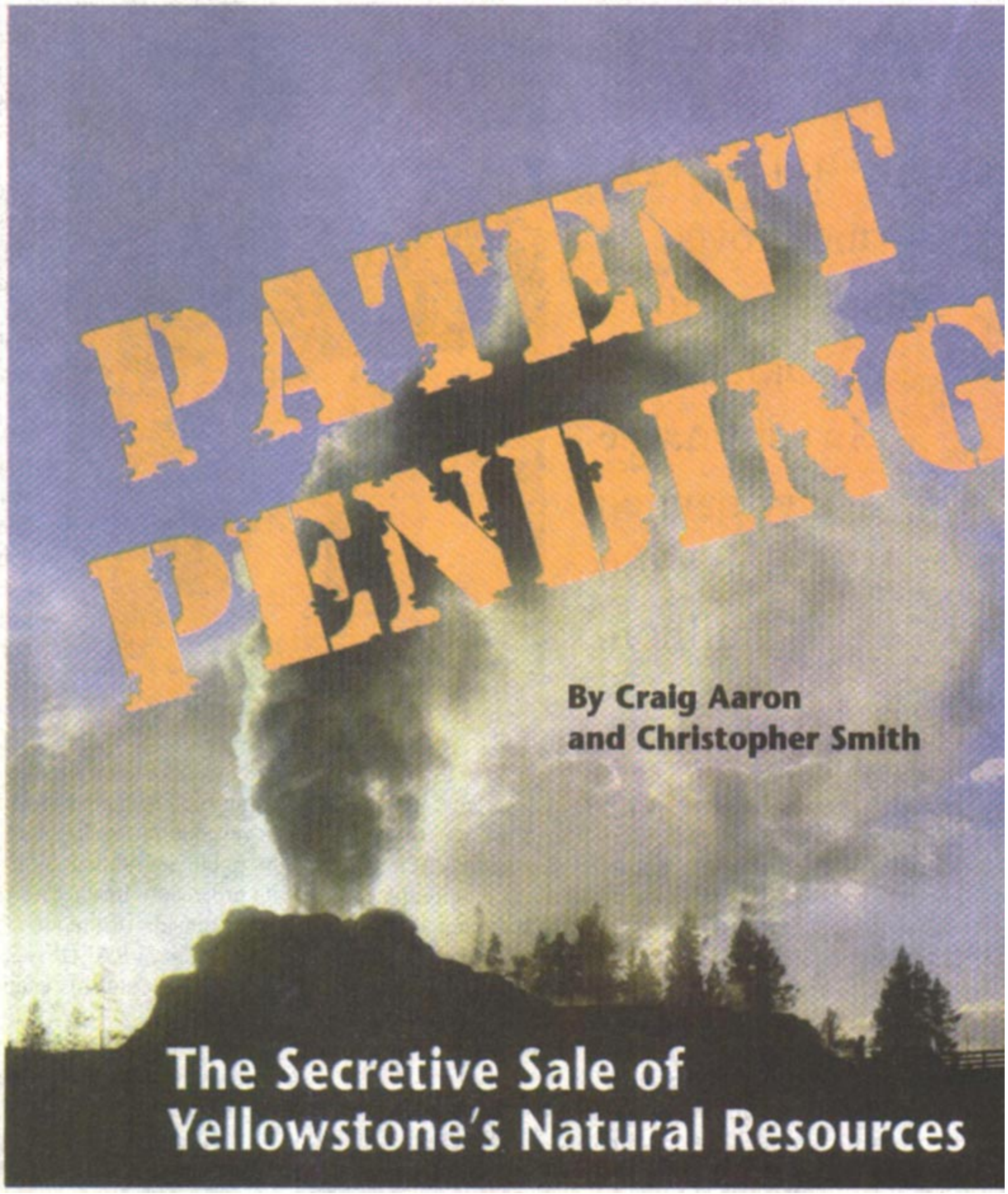
Woodrick, the Iowa union organizer, would like to see an outright ban on tax money being used to move jobs from one state to another. "We're suffering the effects of the shutdown of this plant," he says. "Muskogee is buying jobs down there. Well, what happens if [Waterloo Industries] can't get their production up? Ten years later, they move to another community, and get millions more. This is ludicrous." ■

Neil deMause *is co-author of* Field of Schemes *(Common Courage Press), an investigation of sports stadiums and corporate welfare.*

PATENT PENDING

The Secretive Sale of Yellowstone's Natural Resources

By Craig Aaron and Christopher Smith



It never took a degree in molecular biology to appreciate the mysterious nature of Yellowstone National Park.

"It was a small pool that would suck the water down and in a few minutes it would come gushing out again," Mrs. James Hamilton wrote in her journal upon visiting Yellowstone way back in 1888. "If you put a handkerchief in, the handkerchief would be sucked down and would come up in a few minutes nice and clean."

Park rangers joked that this pool was where the devil took his washing. During the 1960s, biologists discovered that Hamilton's cleaner hanky was the handiwork of millions of microscopic organisms living in the bubbling, geothermal pool. Today, enzymes from these microbes are used in detergents and stain removers.

A countless number of these unusual organisms—known as thermophiles or extremophiles—lurk in the thousands of cauldrons, steam vents, geysers, paint pots, boiling mud ponds and hot springs of Yellowstone. Because of their unique ability to survive under the most extreme temperatures and conditions, enzymes and other genetic material extracted from thermophiles are valuable to a variety of industrial processes. The commercial possibilities of these microbes—from sweetening soft drinks and stripping the paint off old battleships to tenderizing meat and creating clean-burning fuels—have unleashed a rush of "bioprospectors," who are hoping to turn these tiny bugs into big bucks.

Bioprospecting expeditions have been launched from the jungles of Costa Rica and the remote reaches of Antarctica to the bottom of the ocean. But Yellowstone, America's first and foremost national park, may be the jackpot. On its more than 2 million acres, which cover parts of Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, the park houses 80 percent of the planet's terrestrial geysers and more than half of its thermal features. Some scientists say the biodiversity of Yellowstone may rival or even surpass that of rainforests. Yet it's estimated that less than 1 percent of the park's microbes have been found and identified.

The harvesting of microorganisms has minimal environmental impact. Up to a million microbes can be collected from a drop of water, mud or sediment. Bioprospectors say the hunt for marketable microbes is like searching for a needle in a haystack—but the right tablespoon of geothermal fluid could be worth millions.

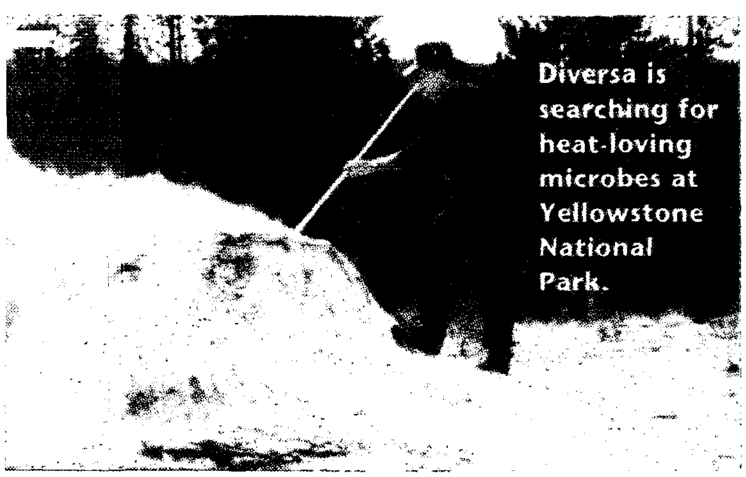
Last August, on the 125th anniversary of the founding of Yellowstone, park officials signed a pact with Diversa, a San Diego-based biotechnology firm, granting the company non-exclusive rights to collect thermophiles from the park. Hoping to cash in on the bioprospecting stampede, park officials relinquished proprietary rights to the microbes to Diversa, in exchange for fees and royalties from any future commercial sales. The Yellowstone contract, officially known as a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement (CRADA), is the first of its kind for the national park system. Under the terms of the CRADA, Diversa will pay Yellowstone $100,000 over five years and donate another $75,000 worth of in-kind services, mostly research equipment. If an enzyme extracted from a Yellowstone microbe becomes commercially

viable, however, Diversa stands to make millions, on which the park would collect royalties.

The deal has landed Yellowstone officials in hot water with environmentalists. They are furious that the park, whose mission is to protect and preserve natural resources, entered an arrangement that allows a private company to patent and market publicly owned organisms. They warn that the Diversa deal sets a dangerous precedent, which could lead to the commercialization of the entire national park system. In short, they say, it's "biopiracy." "No other member of the public is allowed to do what these bioprospectors are allowed to do at Yellowstone," says Mike Bader, a former Yellowstone park ranger who is executive director of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, a Montana-based conservation group that is part of a lawsuit to derail the deal. "We don't know the environmental impacts of this, and it has the smell of big money. If microbes can be sold from the park, what's next?"

Making matters worse, the Diversa pact was intentionally negotiated outside of public scrutiny, skirting the environmental impact assessment and public review process that normally would accompany a deal of this magnitude. But even after the deal was announced, Yellowstone officials—and their superiors at the National Park Service and the Department of Interior—kept the financial details secret. Despite a series of lawsuits and extensive pressure from conservationists, members of Congress and a few media outlets, park officials have refused to disclose their cut in royalties, which may be as low as half a percent. "Never did anyone think to have a national discussion on whether this is an appropriate way to steward our national parks," says Beth Burrows, director of the Edmonds Institute, a small watchdog group from Edmonds, Wash. "The whole thing smacks of arrogance and a lack of concern for open government."

At the very least, the deal with Diversa and subsequent actions of government officials raise serious questions about whether the stewards of the world's most famous national park are acting in the best interest of the American public.


Diversa is searching for heat-loving microbes at Yellowstone National Park.

Historically, the sale or commercial use of national park resources has been banned. This distinguishes the National Park Service from "multiple use" agencies, like the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, where officials are free to arrange royalty agreements when, for example, oil or gold is found on public lands.

However, Yellowstone has allowed non-commercial scientific research of thermophiles in the park for many years. Around 40 researchers currently are permitted to take microbes from Yellowstone for research purposes. Work by this group has already led to some lucrative strikes. In a November 1996 letter to Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt discussing the prospects of bioprospecting at Yellowstone, park superintendent Mike Finley wrote: "Park management believes that approximately 13 thermophilic microorganisms found at Yellowstone already have generated valuable research results for potentially useful biotechnological, pharmaceutical and industrial applications."

The biggest find thus far has been *Thermus aquaticus*, retrieved in 1966 from Mushroom Pool, a hot springs eight miles from Old Faithful, by then Indiana University Researcher Thomas Brock. Back in his laboratory, Brock isolated an enzyme in Thermus called *Taq polymerase*. Genes from *Taq* were grown in the laboratory and patented without any involvement from Yellowstone. Then, in 1991, the giant Swiss drug company Hoffman-LaRoche bought the patents to *Taq*. They used the enzyme to develop a medical diagnostic technique called "polymerase chain reaction," or PCR, which has revolutionized testing for HIV as well as the process of "DNA fingerprinting."

Eureka! The bioprospecting rush was on. "Ever since *Taq* came on the market, everybody and his brother sees the potential for collecting these samples at Yellowstone and making money," says Perry Russell, assistant professor of biology at Cumberland College in Kentucky, who conducts research at Yellowstone.

Hoffman-LaRoche now earns more than $100 million a year from the *Taq* patent, but neither the federal government nor Yellowstone gets a dime in royalties. By 1995, Yellowstone officials started to fear that a gold mine of microbes was being hauled out of the park, without the park being compensated. They didn't want to make the same mistake twice. But, for the Park Service to profit on the next gusher of bugs, they had to circumvent the ban on the commercial use of park resources.

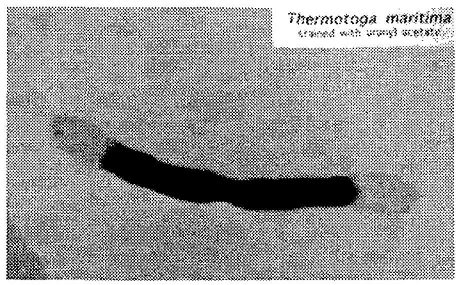
So, Yellowstone officials devised a new classification for microbes that had been harvested from the park. After a great deal of internal debate and help from the biotechnology industry, Yellowstone determined that, because of the extensive process of extracting marketable enzymes or genetic material from thermophiles, the end result is no longer a Yellowstone resource. Instead, they classified it as a patentable "research result." Lindsey McLelland of the Park Service's Washington office advised Yellowstone officials in a 1996 memo, "Although not fitting the classic image of inventions, the products of bioprospecting in national parks can be patentable intellectual property." In other words, according to the government's reasoning, when a thermophile is in a mud volcano, it's public property; once it has been manipulated in the lab, it belongs to Diversa.

Edward Hammond, program officer of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), a genetic technology watchdog group, calls the distinction contrived. "They are taking

the gene from a Yellowstone organism, putting it into another organism and calling it an invention," he says. "What's the implication for the natural world and us as humans if we allow this notion of genes and DNA to be called information and not life?"

The new classification represents a major policy shift for the park. But park officials say that the distinction between resource use and research results is the only way to promote scientific advancement and protect Yellowstone's natural resources from exploitation—while ensuring the park a share of the dividends.

In 1995, they started negotiations with Diversa, a 4-year-old, privately held company, whose clients include Archer Daniels Midland and Dow Chemical. Attracting venture capital on the promise of another *Taq*, it appears that Diversa actually has generated little revenue to date from patented microbes. But, Diversa has inked bioprospecting access deals with Costa Rica and Iceland; it has other pacts in the works with Mexico and Indonesia. CEO Terrence Bruggeman says that while Diversa has more than 300 industrial enzyme patents pending, none involve Yellowstone research. "Until we know this agreement is in place we are not developing any Yellowstone specimens," he says.



Bioprospectors are hoping to turn these tiny bugs into big bucks.

John Varley, director of the Yellowstone Center for Resources, who oversees scientific activities in the park, suspects that the company may already have found a marketable enzyme, but is postponing patenting it until they can avoid litigation.

Conservationists have launched a two-pronged legal attack on the deal with Diversa. In early March, the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, the Edmonds Institute and the International Center for Technology Assessment filed suit against the Department of Interior and the National Park Service, seeking a permanent injunction against the CRADA and any similar future CRADAs, as well as a court order forcing Yellowstone to conduct an environmental impact assessment of the deal.

The suit alleges that Babbitt and Robert Stanton, as heads of the Interior Department and National Park Service, respectively, violated the Technology Transfer Act of 1986, the National Park Service Organic Act, the Yellowstone National Park Organic Act, the National Environmental Policy Act and the Public Trust Doctrine. Specifically, the suit charges that only federal laboratories—not national parks—can enter into CRADAs. Therefore, they argue, the contract with Diversa is illegal. Furthermore, the groups say that the two agencies, which oversee activities at Yellowstone, neglected their mandate to conserve the park's resources, concealed the deal from public scrutiny to avoid an analysis of its environmental and socio-economic impacts, and betrayed the public trust by allowing the commercial use of publicly owned resources. "The Park Service cut a backroom deal and bent laws to allow the commercial exploitation of Yellowstone," says Joseph Mendelson of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Technology Assessment, the attorney for the plaintiffs. "The precedent set by this agreement threatens not only Yellowstone, but all of our parks."

In a separate lawsuit filed in late February, the groups sued the Park Service and the Department of Interior for failing to release all of the financial documents related to the Diversa deal as part of a request made under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). In particular, the plaintiffs are interested in "Appendix B," which details the royalty arrangements between Yellowstone and Diversa. Both the Park Service and the Department of Interior maintain that the financial information is exempt from FOIA requests. In a letter to Babbitt obtained by *In These Times*, Yellowstone superintendent Finley warns that letting the public know how much the park is receiving for the commercialization of its resources, would harm Diversa's "competitive position" and put Yellowstone "at a competitive disadvantage in negotiating permits with other firms."

Opponents reject this reasoning. "The refusal to release the full details of this deal amounts to stonewalling and has nothing to do with protecting a corporation's protective position," says Joe Trento of the Natural Resources News Service. "The public is entitled to know the full story of what is being done with its property."

Decisions in both cases are not expected for months or even years. But the legal wrangling has drawn the attention of two members of Congress. In March, Republican Reps. Jim Hansen of Utah, chairman of the House Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands, and Ralph Regula of Ohio, chairman of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, wrote a letter to Babbitt, demanding release of Appendix B. "We, like the FOIA petitioners, are interested to know just how much money the National Park Service is receiving from selling this public property from one of our country's national treasures," they wrote. "We are unconvinced that this financial information is privileged or confidential and believe that this information should be available to the public."

Their inquiry was also rebuffed. In a written response, Park Service Director Stanton said that release of the information would harm Diversa's business, weaken Yellowstone's negotiating position and illegally share trade secrets. In other words, the park's right to enter the CRADA and withhold the information would be determined by the courts—not Congress. "We believe that if the specific terms of Appendix B were released to the public, the National Park Service's ability to negotiate future CRADAs could be seriously jeopardized," he wrote. "Further, Diversa believes that release of Appendix B would adversely affect its commercial interests."

What are they hiding? It's hard to say. But other documents obtained through the FOIA suggest one good reason the Park Service is trying to keep the details a secret: They got a raw deal.

Although he refuses to be more specific, Varley—who was one of the main architects of the deal along with Finley and

intellectual property attorney Preston Scott, director of the World Foundation for Economic and Development—says the royalties paid to Yellowstone in the Diversa deal range between 0.5 and 10 percent, a huge discrepancy. Judging from internal memos, the actual amount is probably closer to the lower end of the scale. "This document clearly favors the company," Yellowstone Chief Scientist Bob Lindstrom wrote to Varley in a 1997 memo discussing the merits of the Diversa deal. However, Lindstrom recommended accepting lower royalties because the incentive "is necessary since most research and development is expensive and fruitless. Why spend more time negotiating over details that may never result in profits anyway?"

Royalty rates of less than 1 percent are not uncommon in bioprospecting agreements signed in places like Costa Rica, but when it comes to Yellowstone, such an arrangement is dubious at best. Hammond of RAFI questions the priorities of the Park Service. "The American public is not served by essentially giving away or selling at bargain-basement prices resources that are part of all our heritage to companies so they can patent them and profit from then," he says.

John Wright, a spokesman for the Interior Department, counters that Diversa has no more special privileges under the deal beyond those previously granted to other scientific researchers, who have been allowed to study the thermophiles. "This is something that has been going on for years," he says. "The only difference this time around is that Yellowstone is now in a position to share in the financial benefits if they make scientific discoveries in their lab."

For Yellowstone, Diversa is just a guinea pig. If the deal clears all of the legal hurdles, the park plans to negotiate similar deals with at least 20 other companies in the next few years. Yellowstone has earmarked $200,000 from its budget over the next two years to pay Scott, the intellectual property attorney, as a consultant to help broker more bioprospecting deals. Bioprospectors also are eyeing the country's 14 other national parks with geothermal features, hoping that they too offer a bounty of heat-loving bugs. Dozens of other parks may be harboring valuable microbes in caves, grottoes, springs and even ancient seeds left behind in the dwellings of prehistoric Indians.

The courts will decide whether Yellowstone should, as the Diversa slogan says, "join the enzyme revolution." Passionate opponents of the deal, such as Burrows of the Edmonds Institute, hope the protectors of Yellowstone don't go from being protectors to being patent agents. "We didn't preserve Yellowstone for these purposes," she says. "When you visit Yellowstone, you pass under a great arch inscribed with the words, 'For the benefit and enjoyment of the American people.' I don't think this is what the builders of this arch had in mind." ■

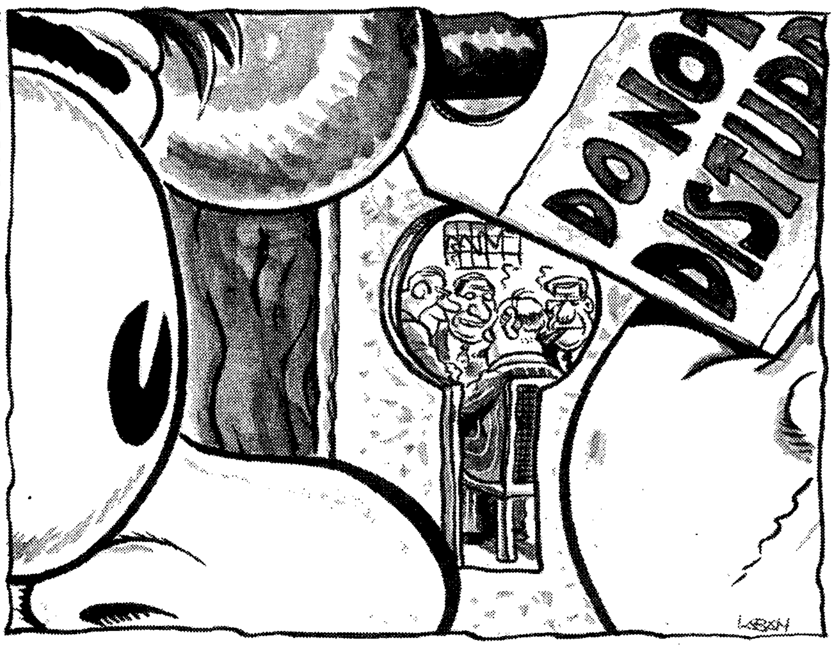
Craig Aaron *is news editor of* In These Times. **Christopher Smith** *is a reporter for the* Salt Lake Tribune.

FED Fetish

Who's keeping an eye on the central bank?

By Annys Shin

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TERRY LABAN



Ever wonder who keeps an eye on America's central bankers? Congress is supposed to, but right now lawmakers on the Hill don't seem particularly interested. Then there's the White House. But the Clinton Administration, grateful for a prosperous economy, has nothing but praise for the Federal Reserve and its chairman, Alan Greenspan. Major newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal* cover the bank closely, but usually in a way that suggests the only people affected by Fed policy are bond traders.

No, the guy who gets the goods on Greenspan and the heads of the 12 district Federal Reserve banks is a former library designer who lives in rural Virginia. Meet Tom Schlesinger, professional Fedwatcher. Schlesinger, 49, started following the Fed more than a decade ago when he stopped designing libraries and started the Southern Finance Project, an informal outfit that provided research for grassroots organizers from neighborhood associations to the American Association of Retired People. The project closed its doors in 1996, only to be reopen last year as the Financial Markets Center, a non-profit think tank based in Philomont, Va.

The Financial Markets Center tries to demystify the Fed and monetary policy for policy makers and ordinary citizens so that they, in turn, can force the country's most powerful economic decision-makers to pay more attention to the interests of working people. After all, by controlling interest rates—and with them the supply of money and credit in the economy—the Fed has an enormous impact on whether millions of us can afford a new home, finance a car, or pay our credit-card bills.

Schlesinger has no sources inside the Temple. Armed with a researcher and about $250,000 in foundation grants, he combs public documents like speeches by Fed officials and economic forecasts published by the Federal Reserve and writes about what he discovers. The results range from scholarly treatises for experts, to what Schlesinger calls "stupid pet trick research"—like a chart on Fed discount rate actions that provides lay readers with a snapshot of Fed policy makers' philosophy on interest rates. *FOMC Alert*, the Center's free newsletter about the Federal Reserve, is a staple in think tanks, union offices and newsrooms. At the grass roots level, the center has begun working with Oxfam America, a Boston-based charity, to educate rural community groups that want to get more involved in financial-market issues. "Tom's unusual because he looks at the issues as an activist would," says James K. Galbraith, an economics professor as the University of Texas. Galbraith admiringly calls Schlesinger a leader of the "loosely knit conspiracy of Fed-watchers" outside of the banking industry.

The center is challenging conventional wisdom about the Fed at a critical time, both for the economy and for the Fed itself. When it comes to managing the economy, the Fed is more powerful than Congress or the president, whose fiscal priorities can be undermined or boosted by what the Fed does with interest rates. Yet, the Fed's members are unelected, and the community and consumer presence on reserve bank boards is miniscule and shrinking. Meanwhile, the financial system has expanded beyond the banking industry, the Fed's traditional turf, now encompassing operations such as mutual funds and insurance companies that are not directly under the Fed's sway. All the more reason, Schlesinger says, to reform the Fed. "I believe in equipping the Fed with more tools to supervise the fast-changing financial system," he says. "But the Fed must accept more accountability in return for more leverage."

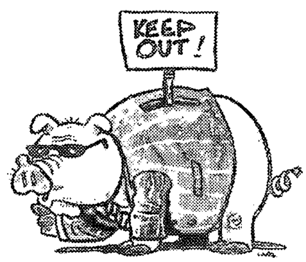
The Fed started out in the second decade of this century as an attempt by the government to bring an out-of-control financial system under some sort of public supervision. During the period of rapid industrialization that followed the Civil War, the United States was wrenched by extreme boom-bust cycles and a series of financial panics created in part by a largely unregulated banking system. Squeezed by exorbitant interest rates, farmers agitated for stronger regulation. And many large banks, stung by the Panic of 1907, sought regulations that would protect the system from these periodic crises. Public control was necessary, as President Woodrow Wilson put it, "so that banks may be the instruments, not the masters" of the economy.

But it was an unelected group of technocrats, not the public,

that Wilson eventually empowered to master the financial system. In 1913, Congress established the Federal Reserve largely as it is today: a seven-member Board of Governors, appointed by the president and approved by the Senate, to balance the power of the 12 regional reserve banks, which are owned by private banks (also called member banks). Governors can serve no more than one 14-year term. The chair serves four-year terms, but is also limited to 14 total years of service.

The Fed's most important policy tool—the one that affects the cost of the average mortgage, car or credit card payment—is the federal funds rate, which is set eight times a year in Washington by the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC). The FOMC is made up of Board members and a rotating crew of reserve-bank presidents; if Fed officials seem out of touch with average Americans, it's probably because they're usually bankers or economists who move back and forth between the Fed and the banks they're supposed to oversee. While economists have widely different views of monetary policy, Fed policy makers are typically cut from the same cloth: They're inflation-fighters. "There's a tendency for one-sided representation of highly conservative economists on the Board of Governors," says Galbraith.

That hasn't always been the case. After World War II, most economists faulted the Fed for having done little to stop the Depression, arguing that its tight-money policies made the economic crisis even worse. In 1946, Congress even revised the Fed's charter in an attempt to avoid a reprise, making full employment, low inflation and maximizing purchasing power all part of the central bank's mandate. For decades afterwards, the Fed was generally reluctant to raise rates for fear of slamming the breaks on economic growth. But another paradigm shift occured in the '70s, when the United States suffered years of high inflation coupled with high unemployment. The Fed responded by raising interest rates, which threw the economy into recession in 1981, but eventually brought interest rates under control. Today, few people even remember that full employment is also part of the Fed's charter.



In the past two years, the United States has had a combination of high employment and low inflation. If the Fed bankers have not reached a consensus about how to deal with this so-called "new economy," they have kept the public in the dark about their disagreements. Traditionally, the Fed has fought tooth and nail to keep it that way. Until 1993, the Fed denied the existence of transcripts of FOMC meetings. When then-House Banking Chair Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Texas) discovered that transcripts existed, Fed officials refused to release them on the grounds that public disclosure would inhibit future policy debate among FOMC members. Most importantly, they argued, the Fed must remain above politics. Now, FOMC transcripts are released after five years. "The republic wouldn't come to an end if FOMC transcripts were released on a two or three year lag," Schlesinger quips. He'd like to see FOMC meetings on C-Span, but the Fed is no more likely than the Supreme Court to let the sun shine in any time soon.

So far, reformers like Schlesinger have made the most headway at the level of the regional Reserve Banks. These banks are required by law to have union and consumer representation among their bank directors. But in recent years, the Fed has actually cut the already small number of labor and consumer representatives on Reserve Bank Boards. According to a Financial Markets Center study, corporate executives last year replaced union representatives and community leaders on the boards of the Reserve Banks in Boston, New York, Richmond and Atlanta. Labor and community groups now make up 6.5 per cent of Reserve Bank directors compared with 9.3 per cent in 1994.

Last year, Schlesinger's Financial Markets Center helped bring an informal coalition of community, labor, farm and development organizations to the table with the president and senior staff of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond to talk about governance and community investment issues. The Center plans to set up similar efforts in the other reserve districts, and to help the AFL-CIO push for labor representation on the Reserve Banks in all 12 districts.

Still, getting people worked up about central banking can be a quixotic enterprise. "There's no denying people feel buffaloed," Schlesinger says. "People's math phobia kicks in. And that's a big challenge to anybody who hopes to do education and organizing." The media doesn't help either. Every year, newspapers and magazines spend months detailing the intricacies of the federal budget, from tax cut proposals that never get off the ground to the latest round of pork barrel spending, sidestepping the fact that monetary policy has a bigger impact on your wallet than fiscal policy.

Schlesinger thinks that more people would pay attention to the Fed if their elected representatives still bothered to watch it. In 1976, Congress began requiring the Fed chairman to explain the Fed's policy rationale to the public twice a year in hearings before the House and Senate Banking Committees, and members used the occasion to grill the chairman on the Fed's policy decisions. But today, the hearings are seen only as an opportunity for Greenspan to mutter oblique soundings on the economy. "[Rep.] Barney Frank [D-Mass.] and [Sen.] Paul Sarbanes [D-Md.] still ask a hard question or two, but then the issue goes away for another six or 12 months," says Schlesinger. "There's no ongoing substantive dialogue on monetary policy between Congress and the Fed."

But John Taylor, the executive director of Community Reinvestment, finds reason to be optimistic. "The times are changing," he says. "People may not connect to Greenspan. But on a local level they're starting to see that they're paying a lot more for banking services, watching branches close and get consolidated. Small business people are noticing they don't have as much access to capital. People are beginning to pay attention. When the word gets out the Fed's only looking out for bankers, people will hold them accountable." ■

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PROFITS OUT OF AFRICA

By Salim Muwakkil

Last year, Mobuto Sese Seko, the dictatorial leader of Zaire, was overthrown by rebel forces led by Laurent Kabila—an ouster made possible by the collective military effort of forces from Rwanda, Angola and Uganda. Residents of Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and human rights watchers cheered the downfall of Mobuto and held out hope for a more peaceful, democratic future. Meanwhile, businesses from the United States and Europe stampeded into the country, vying for a chance to extract the country's minerals and other vast natural resources.

The events in the Congo are just one part of a profound change in politics and power on the African continent. For many centuries, Africa's destiny has been determined by outside forces. First, 250 years of trans-Atlantic slave trade decimated its population. At the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, European diplomats carved up Africa as a way to diffuse the European nations' increasingly rancorous disagreements over clashing spheres of influence. During the Cold War, African nations were made pawns in the superpowers' ideological battles. The end of the Cold War signaled the end of these debilitating proxy struggles and the beginning of a new era in which Africans can work together, and with the rest of the world, to build a better future.

At least that's the thinking in Washington right now. The White House billed President Clinton's 11-day spring tour of six African countries—the longest foreign trip of his two terms and the first by a U.S. president to Africa since Jimmy Carter's in 1978—as a first step in building a new partnership with Africa. And Congress passed the Africa Trade and Opportunity Act, a measure intended to boost trade and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa. As Clinton told the South African parliament during his tour: "It used to be when American policy-makers thought of Africa at all, they would ask, 'What can we do for Africa or whatever can we do about Africa?' Those were the wrong questions. The right question today is, what can we do with Africa?"

But in the wake of Clinton's trip, critics worry that, despite the administration's optimism, the end of the Cold War has only replaced the threat of military imperialism with the threat of economic imperialism. They fear that neoliberal economic policies designed to spur trade and investment will end up impoverishing more people than they enrich. And they are concerned that too many violent dictators, like Nigeria's Gen. Sani Abacha, face little or no pressure to democratize. Indeed, one might legitimately wonder whether U.S. policy in Africa has reached a new stage, or if it is just a continuation of the old.

Africa comprises one-quarter of the earth's land mass, contains 53 sovereign nations and nearly 800 million people, does more trade with the United States than the former Soviet bloc and all of Eastern Europe, and exports more oil to the United States than Saudi Arabia. Yet, the African continent also contains most of the world's poorest countries.

A recent report from the International Labor Organization, points out that Africa is the only region in the world where poverty is projected to increase over the next decade, predicting that the proportion of the African population living in poverty will increase to more than 50 percent by 2000. Unemployment in Africa's large cities is more than 20 percent and is expected to approach 30 percent by the end of the decade. Most analysts concur that the continent is unlikely to escape from this morass without massive investment in education, health and public infrastructure. Such an investment would compel the mobilization of domestic resources, foreign aid and private capital. It would also require an international agreement to reduce the continent's crippling debt burden.

The Clinton administration has made no pretense of addressing those needs, other than to offer a few modest initiatives: $120 million for education over two years, $16 million for health care, $61 million for food production and $30

million for judicial reform in the troubled Great Lakes region (Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Congo). Clinton made few commitments on debt relief. Instead, doing what he does best, he talked. In vague but inspirational terms, he spoke of "an African Renaissance" and a "new U.S. partnership with Africa."

But Africa is more of an exploitable prospect than a potential partner. According to an article in the spring issue of the *World Policy Journal*, the continent is bursting with minerals. While 20 percent of U.S. oil imports come from Africa (particularly Nigeria and Angola), the huge continent also supplies most of its strategic minerals: 54 percent of the world's cobalt, 32 percent of its bauxite, 52 percent of its manganese and 81 percent of its chromium. South Africa alone has 84 percent of the world's reserves of platinum and rich veins also are suspected to be in Zimbabwe as well.

Randall Robinson, president of the lobbying group TransAfrica, fears the administration's African initiative is betttter designed to facilitate the transfer of Africa's resources to foreign interests than to spark an African Renaissance. In a recent interview on a Chicago radio station, he said that many African countries welcome the new relationship "because they see it as all or nothing. But just as Africa was colonized physically, it is now about to undergo de facto economic colonization."

In the brave new world where Western financial authorities such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization set the economic terms and call the political shots, Africa's underdevelopment only enhances its value.

But, to some extent, the interests of the United States and Africa do coincide. The spread of representational government and rational economic policies does create a better climate for investment, but it also provides the stability necessary for social progress. There are many signs that the continent is making positive changes: 26 African states conducted multiparty elections in 1996 and 1997 and the aggregate African economic growth rates in 1995 and 1996 averaged twice that of the previous decade.

According to Salih Booker, director of the Africa Studies Program at the Council on Foreign Relations, this is "the most promising period for Africa since the heyday of African independence 40 years ago." Booker is generally supportive of the Clinton administration's outreach to Africa. The new policy has the potential "to move Africa from the back of the bus of the foreign policy agenda," he said in a radio interview on Chicago's WVON-AM. "[The new Africa policy] will promote greater private business involvement in Africa."

Supporters of the Clinton administration's Africa initiative agree. "When the President of the United States visits these countries," says Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.), who was part of the president's huge entourage, "it not only sends a message of friendship, but also says to investors, the U.S. has an interest. And I don't know any other way to attract badly needed economic resources to Africa without creating a better climate for investors." Like others in Clinton's thrall, Rangel seems to have converted to the "trade not aid" school of thought.

Clinton's ideas are evident in the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. Co-sponsored by Rangel and pro-business conservative Rep. Phillip Crane (R-Ill.), the bill promotes freer trade with sub-Saharan African countries that meet certain criteria, including market reforms and respect for human rights. The bill would allow the president to determine the eligibility of nations to participate in broader U.S. economic and financial aid programs. Facing considerable opposition, the bill passed the House on March 11 by a vote of 233 to 186. Even among members of the Congressional Black Caucus, support was divided 24 to 12. The Senate will consider the legislation later this year.

The bill has been touted as a measure to spur economic growth and Clinton is neoliberalism's most compelling spokesman. But the administration's neoliberal approach, despite its slick veneer, does not dispel all doubters. Critics contend that the bill would work instead to undermine African sovereignty and threaten the jobs of American apparel and textile workers. "The Africa trade bill represents aggregate growth but primarily benefits multinational corporations from various nations operating in the global economy," Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. wrote in a letter to the president opposing the legislation.

Although his father, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, is the Clinton administration's special envoy to Africa and a major point-man for the new policy, Jackson Jr. condemns the measure for containing no provision to ensure African-American participation and no benefits for American workers. He wrote that the bill also lacks protections for African workers against unsafe working conditions, child labor and the environment: "The bill will force 48 sub-Saharan African nations into a straightjacket of economic austerity and deepening poverty in order to benefit transnational financial institutions, wealthy investors and large corporations."

South African President Nelson Mandela launched another devastating critique of the measure. As Clinton listened in the audience, Mandela said the bill was unacceptable in its current form. He says it would compromise the sovereignty of African governments by fully opening American markets only to those nations that the United States decides have embraced the kind of political and economic reforms it approves. That would penalize any country that decided to follow a path not approved by the IMF. And that, Mandela contends, "is just another form of Western imperialism."

Europe and the United States have much to live down from their past behavior toward the "dark continent." The quest for riches drove them then just as it is driving them today. One of the real questions haunting new attempts to recast Africa is whether Africans will benefit at all from this new globalization.

The faltering economies of Asia offer a cogent lesson for the coming African scramble. Can the West overcome the white-supremacist presumptions that rationalized its previous exploitation of the African continent? Can Africans summon the indigenous wherewithal necessary to resist continued exploitation? When these answers come, the voice of African-American leadership must be in the forefront. ■

books

The New Wave

Reconcilable Differences: Confronting Beauty, Pornography, and the Future of Feminism
By Lynn S. Chancer
University of California Press
324 pages, $18.95

REVIEWED BY EDIT M. PENCHINA

In 1993, Katie Roiphe, then a 25-year-old graduate student at Princeton University, published *The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*. Grounded in personal anecdote rather than what academics might seriously label "research," the book decried the glorification of feminist victimhood and claimed that women should embrace sexual experience—for better or worse. That same year, feminist pundit Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire* hit bookstores. With it, "power feminism" and "victim feminism"—terms that are to each other as fire is to water—entered the feminist lexicon. Pretty soon, hot-selling talk of one's sexual pleasure and economic power (tellingly, Wolf's book had the *Dianetics*-esque subtitle *The New Female Power and How to Use It*) blazed in contrast to stifling, Take Back the Night-style shrieks against that nebulous, overarching, victimizing thing: sexism.

Sociologist Lynn Chancer treats the oppositions advanced by Roiphe and Wolf as reincarnations of a "habitual pattern" symptomatic of late-second-wave feminism's "schizoid" mind. Chancer calls it "splitting." The so-called "sex debates" or "sex wars," which haven't ceased since the first low-blows landed in the late '70s, have severed the women's movement along a fault line, dividing the pro-sex from the anti-sexist. Chancer's students at Barnard College—including those who preface their pro-woman statements with "I'm not a feminist, but ..."—now feel they have to choose between keeping their boyfriends or collectively dismantling patriarchy. The achievement of sexual freedom and freedom from sexism have come to seem "mutually exclusive" when they should appear, and are, "intimately connected."

"Clearly," (Chancer uses that word repeatedly, demonstrating her stake in stating what should already seem obvious) "we must find a way to address the melding of sex and sexism without splitting ourselves asunder in the process." *Reconcilable Differences: Confronting Beauty, Pornography, and the Future of Feminism* addresses itself to those feminists who want to repair the movement's split ends. As the title suggests, the book aims to restore friendship and harmony between feminist factions. Toward that aim, Chancer suggests that feminists practice "both/and" rather than "either/or" thinking, recognizing "commonalities" as well as "differences." For, she warns emphatically, "as we splinter among ourselves, sexism may be emboldened in its strength and ability to perpetuate and re-create itself."

"Clearly," Chancer writes, "we must find a way to address the melding of sex and sexism without splitting ourselves asunder in the process."

Reconcilable Differences is, then, an ambitious attempt to plow open a feminist "third wave"—a term the author claims to "have been one of the first people to use." She begins by asking "Why split sex from sexism?" and comes up with a number of answers. For the past 20 years, women have faced the conservative anti-feminist movement that Susan Faludi termed "backlash." The mainstream media, with its "two sides to every story," has created splits as often as it has represented them. And contemporary strains of thinking about social change—especially certain aspects of postmodernist theory—have emphasized plurality and difference at the expense of commonalities. This last factor, according to

Chancer, is partially responsible for an overdetermined atmosphere of *mea culpa*, in which both liberal and radical feminists heap blame on themselves for asserting that women had anything in common in the first place.

These, Chancer exclaims, are just the "antagonistic outside influences." Feminists have not been immune to the factionalizing tendencies common to most U.S. social movements. And within feminism—and here Chancer means second-wave feminist theory—a few weak spots are built-in. In its efforts to confront *the* patriarchal, *Leave It to Beaver* variety of "family," radical feminists failed to understand that not all families are the same. Radical feminist claims that "gender must be the 'deepest' ... form of human oppression" did nothing to unite middle-class white housewives with single black mothers on welfare or lesbians battling heterosexism. The insistence by feminists like Shulamith Firestone that women be recognized "as-a-class" alienated women whose primary ties were to members of their own racial or economic group. Don't get her wrong. Chancer considers herself a supporter of radical feminism—and wishes upon it a "socialist" future in which women unite to guarantee state-sponsorship of health care, child care, reproductive services and other "modest" benefits. But she argues that a "relative emphasis" on difference has diluted the movement, sapping feminism's "precious collective strength."

Though Chancer is critical of contemporary feminism for being too invested in single issues, the case studies that comprise the second part of the book drive the reader into five familiar cul-de-sacs: pornography, beauty, prostitution, sadomasochism and rape. One longs for a less predictably "full circle" route through the feminist landscape. How often are we to confront these inevitably divisive impasses if we wish to move beyond them? How many times must we run through the anti-pornography arguments of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, or Wolf's *Beauty Myth* and Rophie's *Morning After*? Chancer responds: "stubbornly" and "again and again." And her attempts to reconcile the fundamental ideas in some very disparate works are solid attempts to move feminism beyond the ping-ponging debates it now seems to be stuck in.

That's not to say that all of Chancer's arguments work. One problem is that "both/and" thinking can be a superficial band-aid. On a deeper level, there is something curious about the whole sex versus sexism debate. At one point, Chancer aptly suggests that "perhaps the feminist movement has not really been divided into two dual positions. ... What we may be seeing instead is the tendency of American mass media to make it seem as though only two opposing sides of feminist debates about sexuality are worth bringing to public notice." If this statement is true, then the foundation of Chancer's entire argument sits on quicksand. How does one reconcile differences where there really are none?

Radical feminist claims that "gender must be the 'deepest' form of human oppression" did little to unite middle-class white housewives with lesbians fighting heterosexism.

Plus, "sexuality" and "sexism" are not the "rigid" terms that Chancer takes them to be. There is, for instance, a compelling argument that neither the "anti-sex" nor the "pro-sex" feminists have emphasized sex enough. Katha Pollitt, for example, has argued that Roiphe, like the "victims" she derides, actually fails to celebrate the wonder of sexual adventure. Personally, I can't help but recall my open-mouthed shock last fall when, on the television show *Politically Incorrect*, Wolf, the supposed pleasure-seeker, shifted in her seat and suggested that she had never been the master of her own orgasm. So much for the integrity of the pro-sex camp!

And unless sex and sexism split apart cleanly, it does not suffice to simply try and glue them back together. In the end, common vulnerabilities to sexual and economic violence are still the ties that bind. (Though from Chancer's perspective, they seem to bind only within American borders; she fails to present a vision of the third-wave that includes women of the Third World.) Chancer does provide a satisfactory analysis of some of the hard questions in current feminism. But I would hope that many young feminists read her book—then start designing an alternative.

They will not be the first. In 1991—"when the notion of a 'third wave' was still fresh"—Lynn Chancer argued in the pages of the *Village Voice* that feminism could have a unified future. In 1993, Wolf tried to build her own "power feminist" bridge to the 21st century. In 1995, Rebecca Walker (daughter of the novelist Alice) put out a compilation of feminist writings explicitly intended to be the third wave's ideological guide. In 1997, a group of young academic, cyber-savvy and self-proclaimed "punk" feminists published their own collection, called the *Third Wave Agenda*. And this July, the National Organization for Women will hold the first of three annual summits—the premier commemorating the 150th anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls—to define its vision for a "21st-century world."

"It would be preposterous to assert either that feminism has changed the world enough or that feminism has changed nothing at all," Chancer writes. The number of women courageous (and, I dare say, "ballsy") enough to stake claims to the next wave certainly shows how far feminists have come—and how wrong it would be to call this a "post-feminist" era. But there are plenty of bonds to be forged before a collective "we" realizes what Chancer believes to be "feminism's dearest dream—its own obsolescence." ■

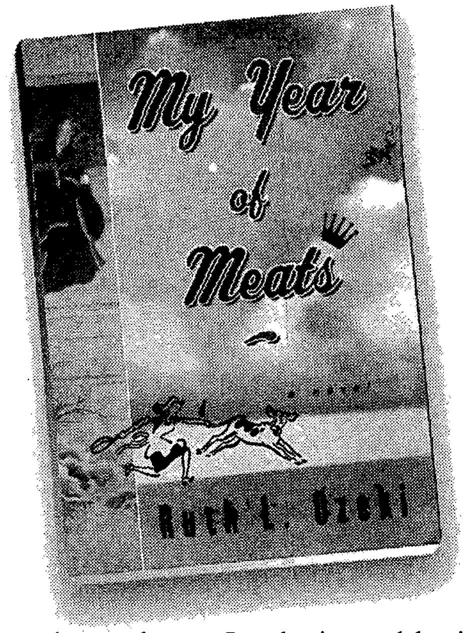
Edit M. Penchina *is a freelance writer living in Oakland, Calif.*

books

Marketing Meat

My Year of Meats
By Ruth L. Ozeki
Viking
352 pages, $23.95

REVIEWED BY MEREDITH SUE WILLIS



Can a sweeping indictment of the meat industry also be a successful novel? In the past, social issues were not considered off-limits for literature. In the 19th century, Charles Dickens' writing about poor children moved forward practical reform and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* caused many white Americans, for the first time, to think of slaves as human beings. The most famous muckraking novel of this century—Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*—offered a scathing picture of the meat packing industry.

But few contemporary novels pay more than minimal attention to such issues. *My Year of Meats* is an exception. In it, Ruth Ozeki takes on the same industry Sinclair exposed in the early part of this century and the commercial propaganda that sustains it now. Specifically, Ozeki presents a brief against the use of dangerous drugs and hormones in meat.

The main character in *My Year of Meats* is Jane Takagi-Little, like the author, a documentary film maker and the child of a Japanese mother and an American father. Jane talks about her work this way, "I wanted to make programs with documentary integrity, and at first I believed in a truth that existed—singular, empirical, absolute," she explains. "But slowly, as my skills improved and I learned about editing and camera angles and the effect that music can have on meaning, I realized that truth was like race and could be measured only in ever-diminishing approximations. Still, as a documentarian, you must strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly."

The novel opens when Jane gets a job making videos called *My American Wife!* for a Japanese audience. Each infomercial-style tape is intended to follow the life of a typical happy American housewife and end with the wife cooking up a typically happy dinner for her family with ingredients that could be purchased by a Japanese housewife. The project is funded by a meat lobbying organization, so it is no surprise that each recipe is supposed to highlight meat. And a memo to Jane and her research staff makes suggestions for how to choose the American wives:

> DESIRABLE THINGS:
> 1. Attractiveness, wholesomeness, warm personality
> 2. Delicious meat recipe (NOTE: Pork and other meats is [sic] second class meats, so please remember this easy motto: "Pork is possible, but Beef is Best!").
> 3. Attractive, docile husband.
> 4. Attractive, obedient children.
> 5. Attractive, wholesome lifestyle.
> 6. Attractive, clean house.

This wonderfully satirical (and hardly farfetched) scenario allows Jane and her crew to tour the United States, meeting all sorts of colorful characters.

Two things happen as the project gets underway. Jane begins to delve into the farming techniques of the meat industry, especially the use of antibiotics and hormones to fatten up livestock. And instead of filming more and more "attractive, wholesome" American women, she becomes attracted to unusual and eccentric families: a Louisiana couple who have adopted many children of many different races; a family that brought its partially paralyzed daughter out of a coma and now runs a healing center; and an interracial lesbian couple who also happen to be vegetarians. Jane's choices, of course, get her in trouble with her bosses, who are represented by Joichi Ueno—a Japanese "salaryman" who goes by the nickname "John Wayno."

The second major character in the novel is John Wayno's depressed and oppressed wife Akiko. She watches *My American Wife!* and cooks American-style meat dishes for her husband. After watching the television program about the lesbian vegetarians, she begins to dream that she too might be a lesbian and thus have an excuse to leave her husband. When John Wayno discovers that she is corresponding with Jane, he becomes abusive. Akiko, now pregnant, runs away to America.

Akiko's and Jane's stories are bound together by threads of satire, humor, motherhood and love. The women also share an enthusiasm for the *Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*. An 11th-century Japanese court lady, Shonagon was an early master of Japanese prose. Her

famously witty lists include titles like "Things That Give a Clean Feeling" and "Squalid Things." Both Akiko and Jane use this device throughout the novel as a way to organize their experiences. Jane, for example, describes John Wayno this way: "As I exhaled and watched him, I started counting categories: Hateful, Unsuitable, ... Things That Give a Hot Feeling ... Things That Are Unpleasant to See." She adds:

> When I'd put enough distance between us, it occurred to me that I was probably the only person in the history of the world who has ever recalled Shonagon in a strip joint in Texas. I liked that.
>
> People Who Look Pleased with Themselves.
>
> I was at the top of that list.

As the novel proceeds, its tone becomes increasingly dark. Jane amasses information about the American meat industry, though Ozeki occasionally struggles to make this material work as fiction. Especially early on, she falls prey to the American fictional fetish of always showing and never telling. For example, when a member of the film crew gets sick eating veal, a conveniently chatty emergency room doctor explains to the narrator that the problem is anaphylactic shock due to antibiotic residues. Then the doctor has several long, awkward speeches explaining veal production and how calves are kept alive with massive doses of antibiotics:

> The young doctor's smile faded. "You know, it scares me. I mean, allergies are one thing. But all these surplus antibiotics are raising people's tolerances, and it won't be long before the stuff just doesn't work anymore. There's all sorts of virulent bacteria that are already resistant."

This is awkward not because of the material, but because the doctor is merely a prop. His only purpose in the book is to provide that information, and he never appears again.

Later on, though, Ozeki handles information much more successfully, especially in Jane's first-person passages. Jane realizes that meat producers are using a banned hormone, DES, which at one time had been administered to pregnant women to stop morning sickness—with dire health consequences to some fetuses. Jane's own mother had taken the drug when she was pregnant with Jane. Ozeki inserts this information skillfully, through Jane's own first-person commentaries. "Once I started researching, it didn't take me long to stumble across DES," Jane explains at one point. "It was a discovery that ultimately changed my relationship with meats and television. It also changed the course of my life. Bear with me; this is an important Documentary Interlude." This sort of witty but serious address to the reader works both because it is an efficient way to convey information and because it is personally and professionally in character for Jane.

In spite of the documentary interludes and epigraphs from Shonagon, *My Year of Meats* is an extremely readable and entertaining book. As a novel, it is not perfect: There are chapters where the sheer weight of appalling topics threatens to collapse the narrative. One relatively short section has anal rape, animal torture, birth defects, drug-induced early puberty and sexual child abuse. In the end, though, it is satisfying because it does many things well. It is the story of Jane's personal discoveries, her relationship to her mother and her hopes; and of Akiko's rising consciousness and her escape from her husband. It tells the stories of other women of different ethnicities and educational levels. It is, in the end, a book that extends the possibilities of what an American novel can do.

With its constant satire of marketing and commercialism, it will be interesting to see how *My Year of Meats* will itself be marketed. My guess is that its hilarious comedy and surreal writing will be emphasized. But the publishing of this book is a great opportunity for Ozeki to speak in public about her issues, and with luck make enough money to finance more research, more films and more novels. ■

Meredith Sue Willis' *latest novel is* Trespassers *(Hamilton Stone Editions).*

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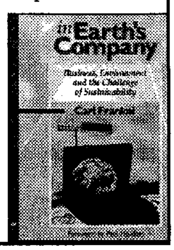

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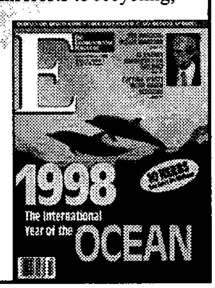

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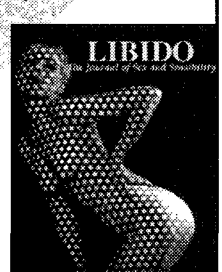

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Continued on page 28

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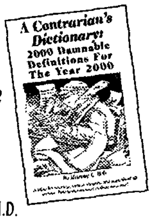

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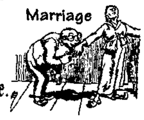

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Continued from page 30

The article closes with Brown saying, "My idea of a good time is being home in my kitchen in big socks and making soup."

For most working parents, preparing meals isn't a luxury, it's reality.

I remember my own mother on weekday mornings, standing at the hall mirror with a mascara wand in one hand and a coffee cup in the other, periodically calling up the stairs to make sure we kids had roused ourselves; she had a job that started before school opened, so there was no diurnal bonding ritual around the breakfast table in our house. And nobody drove her to work or us to school; we walked or took the bus.

The point is that the rich are different.

Last month, the *New York Times* devoted an entire issue of its *Sunday Magazine* to "the joy and guilt of modern motherhood." In it, there were a full-page ad for—yes!—Eileen Fisher clothes and an article on how to "baby yourself" after delivery by wearing—yes again!—Bobbi Brown cosmetics. Brown's prescription, according to fashion writer Mary Tannen, is to "take two minutes first thing in the morning to put makeup on. The weeks after birth can be an emotional time, and it always helps to look as good as possible." Brown also advised the new mother to "enlist any help she could get."

Ah, the help she could get ...

The most disturbing item in the issue was Lucinda Frank's article on the relationship between a white psychotherapist and her black nanny, an immigrant from an unnamed Carribean island. The psychotherapist was the one depicted as the "working mother." This even though the nanny has three children of her own—two of whom are still living with relatives in the Carribean because after working here for nine years, the nanny still can't afford to bring them to New York. Meanwhile, the psychotherapist and her financial-consultant husband have a second home in the Hamptons. But they are good to her, the nanny believes: They helped her get a green card and taught her to drive.

The true nature of the relationship surfaced when the nanny realized she was pregnant with her third child. She recalled her thought process:

> *"What was I going to do? Send another child away? But how could I raise it in this country? And then I remembered it wasn't my decision alone."*

It sounds as if she's referring to the baby's father. She's not. She means her employers.

When she told them, the financial consultant was morally outraged and wondered "what kind of a message" her being "pregnant and not married" would send to his own children. It wasn't her lack of resources that bothered him; it was "bringing up a child without a father." When the nanny told him she could take care of the baby herself, he retorted: "You can't. And I'm not going to."

I guess that's one way to assuage your guilt about not paying your employees enough: Shift the emphasis from your business ethics to their personal morality. Then the problem isn't that they can't afford to have families; the problem is that it's shameful for them to want to have families.

This sort of insensitivity to non-middle-class culture and values is one big reason working-class women never fully embraced feminism. Gender identity and gender roles are not constant across economic and social lines.

Poor women don't hire domestic workers, poor women *are* domestic workers.

Frank Lentricchia, a Duke University literary theorist, grew up in Utica, N.Y., where his mother labored on a General Electric assembly line, then came home and did the dishes. He once complained that "many American literary feminists can't tell the difference between Nancy Reagan and my mother: the difference between a woman of privilege, a 'lady,' and a working woman."

The new editor of *Cosmopolitan* can't tell the difference either. "I probably resemble [my readers] in most ways," Bonnie Fuller told the *New York Times* when she took over the reins from Helen Gurley Brown last year. Except that Fuller's salary is at least six digits, while the average *Cosmo* reader's income is around $40,000.

After Fuller's last pregnancy, it was "not practical" for her to take maternity leave, *Times* reporter Janny Scott informs us. "So, she took a couple of days off, then started working from home" (with the help of a household staff that includes a nanny, a uniformed baby nurse, and an editorial assistant). During Scott's interview, she sat at her kitchen table, nursing her baby while "wearing slim black pants [and] two-inch heels," and waxed philosophical about "working mother guilt."

Yes, despite their glamorous jobs, lofty incomes, and retinues of servants to do the child-rearing, these women still find time to complain about how hard they have it. And to expect empathy. In a cover story last year on the actresses and supermodels who comprise "The New Sexy Moms," *People Magazine* said:

> *...every Hollywood mom finds that the toughest task of all is fitting the role of nurturing mother into a helter-skelter life of auditions, 14-hour days, long absences on far-fling locations and, when possible, a night on the town for old times' sake.*

I keep wanting to yell, "What do they know about it?"

Well, I suppose they feel they have to identify themselves as working mothers because if they looked for sisterhood (or customers) simply by proclaiming themselves "working women," bona fide working-class women wouldn't buy it.

But just because they both have kids doesn't suddenly create parity between a privileged woman and a wage slave. Their jobs and their lifestyles, their concerns and the things they take for granted, remain forever outside one another's ken.

With Mother's Day upon us, I realize that my mother, Elizabeth Kolodzey, and Lentricchia's aren't whom Americans like to picture when they hear the words "working mom." They prefer Eileen Fisher and Bobbi Brown and Niki Taylor on the cover of *People*.

Sure, it's just the latest fashion.

Too bad it isn't one-size-fits-all. ■

Jody Kolodzey *is a writer in Philadelphia.*

The Working Mother as Fashion Victim

By Jody Kolodzey

New York fashion designer Eileen Fisher, whose $80 turtlenecks and $170 wraparound skirts have given her a net worth of more than $50 million, describes her morning routine to two writers from a business magazine:

> *"Every morning, I have breakfast with my kids (Sasha, three, and Zachary, six)," she says. "Then I drop my son off at school and get to the office by nine a.m."*

"It's a routine familiar to many women," the writers observe.

Yeah, but ...

Two paragraphs later, we learn that Fisher has two full-time domestic servants.

"I don't cook, I don't shop," she tells the magazine, and the writers sympathize:

> *The reason is universal, she says: "I like to be with my kids as much as I can so when I'm home, instead of cooking or cleaning, I like to be there for them with my full attention."*

What mother wouldn't? But how many can afford to?

Among the rich and famous, the label "working mother" has become a fad, and those who wear it have deluded themselves into believing they are connecting with the masses. But as usually happens when something becomes fashionable, it gets priced out of the range of ordinary people. A woman may have kids and a job, but in order to fit the current media image of a "working mom," she needs a lot more than that.

Fisher has a doppelganger of sorts in makeup artist Bobbi Brown, who started out painting faces for New York fashion shows and now has her own line of cosmetics ($18 for a lipgloss at Nieman Marcus, as compared to $5 for Revlon at the Rite Aid). In an interview with Brown last year, *New York Times* reporter Carol Lawson played up the "working mom" angle:

> *In a high gloss business, she resembles nothing so much as a harried working mother. And that may be part of her appeal: juggling work and family as the mother of two young sons, she connects with customers who are, like her, too busy to fuss with makeup.*
>
> *"Many women come up to me and say, 'I'm a working mom too,'" Ms. Brown said.*

Brown doesn't have it quite as together as Fisher in the morning. (Then again, her company is worth only $30 million.) Lawson writes:

> *Her day typically begins with taking one of her children to school (no time to take both) in a chauffeur-driven car before heading into Manhattan. She puts on her makeup in the back-seat.*

Gee, that must be rough, all those sharp instruments near your eye in traffic and all. But I'm really wondering about that other kid. Does he ever make it to school? Will he grow up scarred from the experience of being left behind? Will he resent his brother, lamenting like Tommy Smothers that "Mom always liked you best."

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